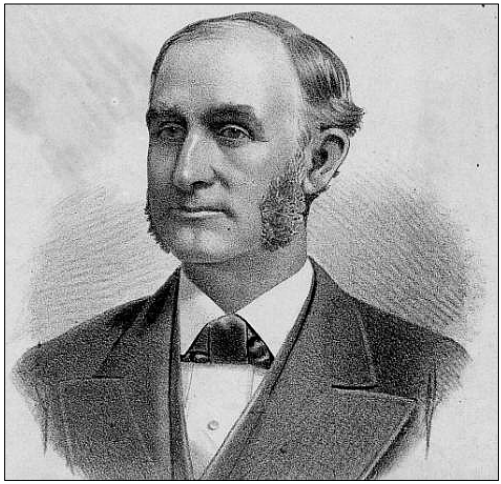
Lumber Baron



The Story of Peter Herdic, Entrepreneur Extraordinaire

**He turned tiny Williamsport, Pa.,
into the lumber capital of the world
. . . . and a city of millionaires**

By Michael J. Cummings

Who Was Peter Herdic?

"The Prince of Entrepreneurs"
–J. K. Durborrow, *The Huntingdon (Pa.) Journal*, 1871

"The most energetic, farseeing, and
successful man of his time"
–*Lycoming Reporter*, March 10, 1888

"The kind of up-from-his-bootstraps character
who makes you proud to be an American"
–John Kelly, *The Washington Post*, Jan. 7, 2012

"The Lumber King of Pennsylvania"
–*Columbus (Ga.) Daily Times*, July 23, 1879

"[The man who] made Williamsport what it is today"
–*The New York Times*, March 3, 1888

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Conventions

Abbreviations

ca.: circa. About, approximately, as in ca. 1860, ca. 1875.
no.: number. Used in citations, as in vol. 3, no. 1.
p.: page. Used in citations, as in (p. 1) or (p. 64).
pp.: pages. Used in citations, as in (pp. 22-25) or (pp. 5, 9).
para.: paragraph. Used in citations, as in (para. 3).
qtd. **in**: Used to cite a quotation in an author's work that first appeared in another work by another author.
vol.: volume. Used in a citation, as in vol. 2.

Citations: Modified MLA Style

This book follows the Modern Language Association (MLA) style for identifying research sources in the text. However, in the list of cited works, URLs for internet sites are not displayed but instead are incorporated in links to the sites. If a link fails to work, type the information related to the citation in the box of a search engine and press *ENTER*.

Contacting the Author

You may contact the author at mcum.mings@mail.com to:

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1 *An Overview of Herdic's Life*

When the north-central Pennsylvania town of Williamsport became the lumber capital of the world in the nineteenth century, the dynamo driving its development from a quiet borough into a bustling urban center was a wily entrepreneur named Peter Herdic. The enormous profits that the lumber industry earned from dense forestland resulted primarily from Herdic's business and political savvy and his uncanny ability to peer into the future and see its promise.

After he shepherded Williamsport—the seat of Lycoming County government—to international prominence, the town's promoters boasted that it had more millionaires per capita than any other city in the world. *The New York Times* and *The New York Sun* wrote about Williamsport's progress under Herdic's leadership.

His passion for conceiving and engineering grand enterprises apparently sprang from an inborn desire to achieve. From early childhood to the last breath he drew, this desire exhibited itself in almost all the qualities that modern experts in human behavior say make up the core motivations of the best and brightest entrepreneurs. Perhaps the most important of these qualities was his vision. Peering into the future, he would see an opportunity it presented; then, without hesitation, he would prepare to capitalize on it. For example, long before other

investors recognized the promise of the dense forests of north-central Pennsylvania, he purchased thousands of acres of the region's woodlands crowded with valuable pine, hemlock, and oak trees. After other investors realized that timber betokened money, he sold them parcels of his land, at a substantial profit, on which to establish lumber companies and erect mills to process cut logs. Herdic himself founded lumber enterprises of his own. In time, the investors made their millions from the land, and so did Herdic.

In anticipation of a rising demand of the newly rich for fine homes to show off their wealth, Herdic carved up his real estate in and around Williamsport into lots for the homes and contracted with a talented architect, Eber Culver, to design them. He also reserved land for new business buildings. In an article looking back on his career and the extent of his land holdings, the *Chicago Tribune* observed, "His estates are so great that a person cannot get to any part of Williamsport without pointing to some portion of his property" ("Peter the Great," p. 5.)

Over time, Herdic fashioned Williamsport (population 1,615 in 1850) into a city of nearly 27,000 residents by the late 1880s. Twelve years after his death, the population of its metro area stood at 104,000 ("Metropolitan Area").

But being an entrepreneur required Herdic to throw dice to turn his dreams into reality. And he did so, again and again, putting

his money and reputation on the line to make an envisioned future a present success. It may well be that he enjoyed jeopardizing his bankroll. He did not smoke or drink, but he loved gambling with greenbacks.

Throughout his adult life, he invested in business projects to benefit his community and himself while satisfying his desire to achieve. If necessary, he borrowed money to execute his ventures. Most were highly successful, some exceeding expectations. With the profits, he invested in still more enterprises. An entrepreneur does not sit on his money. He makes it work for him.

Herdic was not averse to altering a plan or an ongoing project to improve its likelihood of success. When local, state, or federal officeholders opposed a Herdic enterprise requiring government approval, he used political savvy to manipulate them into doing his bidding. His enemies maintained that he even resorted to bribery and other illegal measures to get his way. Such a *modus operandi* is commonplace among entrepreneurs, said Dr. Ross Levine of the University of California at Berkeley and Dr. Yona Rubinstein of the London School of Economics. In “Smart and Illicit: Who Becomes an Entrepreneur and Do They Earn More?,” they analyzed census statistics between 1995 and 2012 and found that “incorporated entrepreneurs” often used “smarts” and “aggressive, illicit . . . activities” to realize their goals. However, despite accusations

and rumors that Herdic violated laws, no one ever proved the charges.

Oddly, Herdic had little formal education—except for practical experience—to guide him in his financial and business activities, to say nothing of his decision-making in the architectural styles gracing his buildings. Nevertheless, his lack of diplomas did not hinder him from acting boldly to achieve his goals and earn national recognition as one of the shrewdest financiers of his day.

Rainer Zitelmann, an entrepreneur, real-estate expert, historian, and sociologist, has observed in "The Rich Are Different":

> There is no correlation between performance at school and university on the one hand and financial success on the other. 'Implicit learning' and 'implicit knowledge'—or more simply put, gut feeling and intuition—are more important than what psychologists call 'explicit learning' and 'explicit knowledge'—that is, academic learning. (Section 3, "The Wealth Elite")

If Herdic sometimes bullied politicians, stories about him suggest that he treated ordinary citizens and his office employees well. One of those stories appeared in a 1974 issue of *The Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society*. The story said Herdic increased the salary of Hermon Hinckley, his

bookkeeper, by a substantial sum one evening when both men were working on the ledgers. Three days later, when both were again poring over their account books, he raised the salary of Hinckley a second time by the same amount. ("The Story of," pp. 17-18).

Herdic was also generous to the citizens of Williamsport, sometimes donating houses to the poor and real estate to the local government. Though he was never described as a fervent churchgoer, he gave land or money to Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations. He paid for most of the costs of erecting Williamsport's Trinity Episcopal Church, at 844 West Fourth Street. He was a member of the church.

At the center of his business world were the flourishing forests of north-central Pennsylvania—in particular, their pine, oak, and hemlock trees. Pine—notably eastern white pine (species: *pinus strobus*)—had been one of the most valuable trees in America since colonial times because of its straight grain and strength. Of white pine trees in general, botanist Donald Culross Peattie wrote, "No other tree has played so great a role in the life and history of the American people" (Pastor, para. 9).

Depending on the species, white pines reached heights of eighty to two hundred feet. In the years leading up to the American Revolution, the British government declared that it owned the pine forests in the colonies and reserved them for the construction of masts and spars that enabled the Royal

Navy to maintain worldwide maritime supremacy. American colonists denounced the move as a usurpation of their natural resources, providing them one more reason to go to war against the Crown. When the rebellion broke out, “a white pine image adorned many Revolutionary War flags, including the one raised at Bunker Hill” (Pastor).

Besides its importance in shipbuilding, pine—a softwood—saw widespread use in constructing homes, barns, sheds, fences, public buildings, and warehouses and in crafting furniture, desks, cabinets, boxes, toys, and other products. A key property of pine was its superior ability to absorb paint.

Manufacturers used oak, a hardwood, to make furniture, sturdy frames for ships, barrels for liquor and wine, railroad ties, long-lasting floors, steps, doors, kitchen cabinets, woodwork and trim.

Tanneries used the chemicals in the bark of hemlock, a dense and strong softwood, to produce leather products. Tanneries had existed in Lycoming and nearby counties in Pennsylvania since the late 1700s.

Both pine and hemlock, stripped of their bark, also served as supports in coal mines because of their elasticity—that is, their ability to bend or flex under the pressure of the mine ceilings in tunnels without breaking.

Williamsport's infant lumber industry rose to its feet after two former New England lumbermen, John Leighton and Major James Perkins, came to the region to survey the forest riches and waterways, including the West Branch of the Susquehanna River, which formed the southern border of the town. They determined that a placid stretch of the river immediately west of Williamsport would be an ideal place to gather logs floating in from woodlands near and far.

To corral the logs, Perkins and Leighton—both experienced lumbermen from New England—decided in 1846 to build the Susquehanna Boom, a gigantic structure that received the floating logs, like a Poseidon with open arms, and confined them until sawmills and planing mills were ready to process them. A detailed description of the boom appears in Chapter 3.

To execute their plan, Perkins and Leighton formed the Susquehanna Boom Company, selling 100 shares of stock to investors. One of them, John DuBois, became president of the firm. In 1851, the company completed the "beta" version of the boom. However, it took years of use during adverse weather conditions, including devastating floods, until alterations and tweaks to the huge structure enabled it to withstand high water and perform as expected.

Realizing the enormous potential of the boom, Herdic joined with two other investors to purchase it in 1857. Then he used his political genius—and perhaps his pocketbook—to

manipulate the Pennsylvania General Assembly into doubling the fee charged to use the structure. The boom could hold hundreds of thousands of logs at a time, each one branded on both ends with a special code representing the name of the lumber company that owned it. Herdic and his partners reaped a bumper crop of profits. So did anyone else connected with the lumber industry, including the companies that paid the higher fees. All was well.

In a short time, Williamsport became the world's best source for lumber of superior quality. Three tributaries above the boom—Pine Creek, Larrys Creek, and Lycoming Creek—carried logs to the river to float into the boom.

In 1861, after the outbreak of the American Civil War, Union demand for lumber rose dramatically. The troops used it for wagons, fuel, ships, fortifications, bridges, field quarters, shelters, and gunstocks. Consequently, Williamsport-area sawmills, planing mills, and factories that sprouted from Herdic's efforts were kept busy cutting and shaping timber for the soldiers, as well as virtually any war-related product requiring wood, even matchsticks.

The manufacture of railroad ties was especially important for the transport of troops and supplies. Demand for the ties remained high after the war and in the last decades of the century.

"By the late 1800s," according to *Pennsylvanians and the Environment* at *ExplorePAhistory.com*, "railroads were using more than 15 percent of the nation's timber supply. Each mile of track required 2,500 wooden railroad ties, which [were] constantly replaced" (para. 5).

In the 1870s, when a worldwide economic downturn wiped out the bank accounts of untold numbers of investors, including Herdic, he invented a horse-drawn forerunner of today's yellow cab to raise cash. Between the 1880s and the early 1900s, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, Denver, San Francisco, Washington, and other cities and towns in the U.S. purchased patented versions of the cab, called—what else?—a *herdic*. The word can be found today in unabridged English dictionaries.

Of Herdic's irrepressible drive to achieve success in this venture, as well as in previous enterprises, *The Carriage Journal* observed:

> The rapid growth of the economy of the United States during the nineteenth century brought forth a number of ambitious and enterprising individuals whose multifarious operations were on a huge scale even by today's standards. One of these pioneering entrepreneurs was Peter Herdic. ("The Herdic Coach," p. 171)

Herdic also served as the president of a bank he founded, the publisher of a newspaper he purchased, the mayor of the city he was building, an investor in numerous retail businesses small and large, the developer of a park with a racetrack, and a philanthropist. However, he had a tendency to take on too many ventures at the same time, not infrequently borrowing ready cash to execute them. (Herdic's assets were tied up mostly in real estate and businesses.) This flaw would later plunge him into debt and find him a ripe subject for a Sophoclean-style tragedy. But he had the sass to rise from ruin to regain his stature in the community.

Herdic's untiring pursuit of his dreams apparently sprang in part from a physical constitution as strong as the brick and mortar of many of the still-existing buildings he constructed. *The (New York) Sun* described him this way: "Mr. Herdic is a ruddy-faced, stout-built man, 53 years old. He . . . has massive features, a clear grey eye, and evidently never had a day of sickness in his life" ("Story of," p. 4). Throughout his life, he capitalized on his good health, his foresight, his drive, his instincts, and his perseverance to become an entrepreneur extraordinaire—one who seized on nearly every promising opportunity that came his way.

Fascinating Fact

Pennsylvania's Pine Creek—which floated log harvests to the West Branch of the Susquehanna River—is the largest creek in the United States, according to the late Steven E. Owlett, author and publisher of *Seasons Along the Tiadaghton. Wikipedia* cited him as making that claim. After flowing more than 87 miles, the creek enters the river's West Branch on the border between Lycoming and Clinton Counties at a point between the boroughs of Jersey Shore and Avis. After reaching the river, the logs floated into the Susquehanna Boom.

2 *In the Beginning*

Encyclopedias and history books will tell you that Peter Herdic was born on Dec. 14, 1824, in Upstate New York in the village of Fort Plain, at the confluence of the Mohawk River and Otsquago Creek. He was the last of seven children—all boys, according to the nineteenth-century Williamsport historian John Meginness (Chapter 48).

Peter's parents were Henry and Elizabeth Herdic, both of Dutch ancestry. When Peter was eighteen months old, his father died after overtaxing himself in a log-lifting contest (Wolfe, p. 120). A short while later, Mrs. Herdic moved with her family to Ithaca, Tompkins County, N.Y., about 104 miles southwest of Fort Plain as the crow flies. There, she became a washerwoman while the children helped their mother eke out a living by running errands and performing other chores for neighbors. Peter's brothers no doubt served for him as models to imitate or outdo.

In 1830, when Peter was in his sixth year, his mother remarried and moved with her husband and brood to a farm five miles west of Ithaca. Peter briefly attended a school in Ithaca that followed the monitorial system (also called the Bell-Lancaster method), in which the older students helped the instructor teach the younger students (Wolfe, p. 120).

By age ten, Peter, an industrious fellow, was beginning to reap the rewards of free-market enterprise. For the pleasure of rubbing together a few coins in his hand, he would trap small game such as rabbits and quail, walk the five miles to Ithaca, and sell the animals to help his family while also plumping his savings (Wolfe, p. 120). In addition, he sold peaches he picked and water at a penny a glass ("Peter Herdic Vindicated," p. 1).

In 1837, when Peter was thirteen, his stepfather died, and his mother sold the farm to a stepson and bought fifty acres of uncultivated land along Pipe Creek, a small stream eight miles southwest of Owego, N.Y. The creek flows into the North Branch of the Susquehanna River, not far from the northern border of Pennsylvania. While living in a rented house, the family cleared the Pipe Creek land and built its own log house. In the next seven years, Peter helped his brother Benjamin grow and harvest crops. Then, as a young adult, he struck out on his own.

First, he worked at a Pipe Creek sawmill owned by William Ransom, diligently saving as much of his earnings as he could ("Story of," p. 4). He proved to be as conscientious and hard-working as any of the older, more experienced men in the mill. Consequently, in a short time, he received a wage equal to theirs. Afterward, he worked for two years at another sawmill, owned by a man named George Severns, earning room, board, and pay while gaining more experience in the operation of

sawmill equipment. Next, he accepted a job at a shingle mill ("Story of," p. 4).

While working in the mills, he lent money at interest and moonlighted at odd jobs. His labors in New York State earned him $400, an amount equal to more than $16,000 today (*Dave Manuel.com*). These early years suggest that he was ever ready to better himself and fatten his wallet whenever an opportunity arose. Looking back on his life, *The (New York) Sun* observed that "Herdic is a man who thinks he can see money in everything. His faith in his own ability seems unbounded" ("Story of," p. 4).

In 1846, Herdic and a friend, William Andress, moved to Cogan House Township, Pa., twenty-four miles northwest of Williamsport, and bought a shingle mill from a man named Hubbard Webster. It yielded substantial profits over the next three years (Wolfe, p. 121) and deepened Herdic's knowledge of the lumber industry and the management of his money.

When he was twenty-five, Herdic acquired the 154-acre farm of Alexander Kyle along Lycoming Creek and built a home. In December of 1849, he married lovely Amanda Taylor, a twenty-year-old native of Smithboro in Tioga County, N. Y. Success on his farm and in his previous jobs enabled him to purchase a sizable parcel of real estate thick with trees. Then, in partnership with another investor, he built a sawmill powered by steam. This relatively new technology processed

lumber faster and more efficiently than existing water-powered mills.

The township at that time had an abundance of prized timber species, including pine, in virgin forests. Over the next four years, he became the sole owner of the mill, earning a profit of $10,000 from sawn wood. The value of the mill stood at $1,200. The combined totals would tally up to more than $400,000 in 2025 currency (*Dave Manuel.com*), minus liabilities. With the added equity in his farm and home, he and his wife were flourishing—if not wealthy—though he was still a year shy of thirty.

Aware of the nascent lumber industry in Williamsport and its neighboring communities along the Susquehanna River, he decided in 1853 to sell his properties and move to the town to become an entrepreneur of standing and respect. Herdic knew that Williamsport at that time was a quiet little borough whose residents were just awakening to the forest riches surrounding them, riches that only a few were exploiting. The time seemed right, therefore, for him to capitalize on the knowledge he had gleaned from his employment in New York State and his self-employment in Pennsylvania. Certainly he had the personal qualities required to succeed: ambition, creativity, motivation, and perseverance.

Two major developments at that time promised to reward him for his decision to move.

The first was a decline in the pine industry in Maine. Important domestic and foreign markets had been relying for a long time on supplies of processed white pine trees from the New England states, particularly the tall white pines of Maine. But the harvests of pine trees, which had helped to earn the port of Bangor the title "lumber capital of the world," began to diminish by the mid-nineteenth century. Lloyd C. Irland later wrote:

> By the Civil War, the bulk of the accessible pine was already cut out of the Maine woods. Spruce took over as the lead species and was already dominating the log booms Thoreau [Henry David Thoreau, major American essayist and poet] saw when he first visited Bangor in 1846.

Some of the New England lumbermen moved to other timber locales, including the primordial pine forests of north-central Pennsylvania, to apply their considerable skills and share their knowledge.

The second major development was the expansion of railroads after 1833, when the entire country had fewer than 400 miles of tracks, according to the Association of American Railroads ("Chronology"). By 1850, the association said, the nation had more than 9,000 miles of tracks and, by 1860, more than 30,000 miles.

Railroads needed increasing supplies of wooden ties to lay tracks. They also needed planks and panels to build cars, passenger stations, and water towers.

Villages, towns, and industries sprang up along the routes of the expanding railroads, creating new markets for finished wood products such as shingles, flooring, doors, molding, tables and chairs, stools, beds, window frames, lathe-turned posts, lattices, rowboats, and tool handles.

One may fairly speculate that before Peter Herdic relocated to Williamsport with his wife, he looked into his crystal ball and saw railroad cars hauling north-central Pennsylvania wood products in all directions of the compass.

At the time, only one railroad served Williamsport. It was a short line called the Williamsport and Elmira Railroad, which ran no farther than the village of Ralston, twenty-six miles to the north. But in 1854, a year after Herdic moved to Williamsport, the railroad lived up to its name, extending its length all the way to Elmira (seventy-two miles north of Williamsport), in New York State's southern tier, just across the Pennsylvania border. In 1863, the rail line became part of the Northern Central Railway and later part of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the world's largest railway system.

Also in 1854, the Sunbury and Erie Railroad built a line between Williamsport and Milton (about 21 miles southeast of Williamsport), then another line in 1855 to Sunbury (about 40 miles southeast of Williamsport). After the expansion continued, the Sunbury and Erie became the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad. The P & E also became part of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Consequently, Williamsport's railroad tracks did indeed run in all directions, carrying passengers and freight—including shipments of lumber products—making manifest what Herdic likely foresaw.

Fascinating Facts About Sunbury

Thomas Edison chose Sunbury, Pa. (mentioned in the above paragraph) to be the first city in the world to have a building (the City Hotel) illuminated by electric lights connected to a power plant.

Lorenzo da Ponte, who wrote the words to many of Mozart's most famous operas, lived in Sunbury between 1811 and 1818.

Chemist Joseph Priestley, discoverer of oxygen, lived in Sunbury from 1798 until his death in 1804.

3 *Boomtown*

When Peter and Amanda Herdic arrived in Williamsport in 1853, all the residents lived in what is now the downtown, which was no more than a forest clearing. It "existed only as a crossroads community . . . as a marketing point for the numerous small farms of the area," said *Living Places* in an Internet article titled "Millionaires' Row."

However, two years before Mr. and Mrs. Herdic arrived, the first version of the Susquehanna Boom had been completed, promising prosperity if it could prove to be durable and efficient. It was to serve as a "corral" to receive floating logs and store them for later processing.

The river was to act as a kind of superhighway that carried log traffic from western locales into the boom. The logs would be transported to the river from forest slopes or driven into it from tributary creeks. Just west of Williamsport, the logs would float into the boom—hundreds of thousands of them.

The West Branch of the Susquehanna is 240 miles long if bends and zigzags are factored into the measurement. It begins in Indiana County at the present-day village of Cherry Tree—about 130 miles west of Williamsport—and ends at Shikellamy State Park in Northumberland County, about 34 miles southeast of Williamsport. There, it joins the North Branch of the river to

form a single waterway that flows south through Harrisburg, the state capital, and on to Chesapeake Bay. Before the construction of the boom, loggers in Lycoming, Clinton, Tioga, Potter, Centre, Cameron, Clearfield, and other counties rafted their logs to sawmills. Many of the best paying mills were far downriver. It was not uncommon for raftsmen to travel all the way to Chesapeake Bay to get good prices for their logs at sawmills supporting the shipbuilding industry.

Herdic had his eyes on the boom, but he first decided to buy more forestland—some of it surrounding Williamsport and some of it in distant regions to the north and northwest. The *Williamsport Sun and Banner* said, "At one point, he was the sole owner of 54,000 acres of timberland. . . . " ("Peter Herdic").

He also bought land along the river east of the boom; it was perfect for constructing sawmills, planing mills, and other buildings specializing in processing wood. It was not long before other investors purchased the Herdic-owned riverside land to build their mills and factories. Herdic himself became a partner in several sawmills and joined with B. H. Taylor to construct a gristmill and flour mill at the foot of Hepburn St., then imported grain from the West for processing.

Meanwhile, Amanda spearheaded a drive to establish a Baptist congregation in Williamsport. Although she succeeded in recruiting parishioners, there was no church for services. So her

husband donated land for one at the northeast corner of Elmira and West Fourth Sts. The congregants, who had been meeting at the Lycoming County Courthouse, then constructed a wooden church, First Baptist. Amanda's father, Foster Taylor, became a deacon. Nearby, on the south side of West Fourth St. at the edge of the downtown, Herdic constructed an imposing Italian-villa style mansion for himself and his wife. She would have only a two-minute walk to get to church.

The home stood as a showpiece to inspire other wealthy citizens to build mansions of their own. To prepare for this possibility, Herdic gambled on purchasing most of the land between the Susquehanna River and West Fourth St., with Lycoming Creek—about two-and-a-half miles from the downtown—as the western boundary. He also bought parcels north of West Fourth.

Over the years, citizens by the hundreds did buy lots carved from his real estate, and the wealthiest of them did construct their dream houses, mostly on West Fourth and nearby thoroughfares. Herdic realized substantial profits from the sales, and in the ensuing decades the West Fourth St. strip came to be known as Millionaires' Row.

"It may not be amiss to state that the . . . streets and avenues subsequently opened through these various tracts of land [were given by Herdic] to the city free of cost," wrote Paul Wolfe (p. 122).

Herdic's splendid home and many of the other mansions rose under the supervision of Herdic's favorite architect, Eber Culver, who was also a native of New York State and was the same age as Herdic.

Culver was born near Saratoga Springs, N.Y., in 1824 and moved with his family to Auburn, N.Y., when he was a child. He attended various schools, became a carpenter, and lived for a time with his sister in Dayton, Ohio. In 1848, he traveled seven months overland to California to capitalize on the gold rush. He had no luck (Gerhardt, p. 114).

After returning to New York State, he decided to study architecture on his own. One of the main sources he used was *L'architecture privée au XIXe siecle* (*The Private Architecture of the 19th Century*), by M. César Daly (Rubendall, p. 69). With his growing knowledge of the profession, he landed a job with a company in Elmira, N.Y., Webb and Gibson, which moved to Williamsport in 1855. Eventually, Culver met up with Herdic and became his preferred architect (Rubendall, p. 69).

While Herdic was working to establish footing in his new surroundings, Amanda gave birth to a daughter, whom the Herdics named Florence Louise and nicknamed "Flora." But tragedy struck in December 1857, when Amanda died of a cause never identified. Herdic must have been deeply grieved. He saved locks of her hair to serve as a chain for a pocket watch he carried, a picture of which is on display at the

Lycoming County Historical Society's Thomas T. Taber Museum, at 858 West Fourth St., Williamsport. To assuage his grief, Herdic immersed himself in his work in the lumber industry and in his acquisition and management of properties and businesses.

Paul Wolfe wrote that Herdic joined with W.C. Bronson to build one "of the largest sawmills in this section of the State" (p. 122). But it was not *the* largest. That honor belonged to the mill of William Dodge. In one year, 1867, it "employed 200 men and [used] 112 saws to cut 25,000,000 feet of lumber," said "The Mills That Made Williamsport," published by the *Historical Marker Database*. The Dodge mill was the largest sawmill in the world at that time, according to "Explore History on the Lumber Heritage Water Trail" (para. 6).

Herdic had already taken his deepest plunge into the lumber industry in the year that Amanda died, 1857. That was when he partnered with two others experienced in the lumber business —Mahlon Fisher and John G. Reading, both originally from New Jersey—to purchase enough stock in the boom to become the majority owners of it. But they inherited a serious problem: conflict with the previously mentioned upriver raftsmen who had been transporting logs past Williamsport to markets downriver.

These raftsmen—many from a hundred or more miles to the west—maintained that free-floating logs destined for the

Susquehanna Boom imperiled their safety and delayed their trip. Moreover, they said, the boom was robbing them of their livelihood. In an article in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Thomas R. Cox said the raftsmen tried to protect their interests by attacking woodsmen cutting trees for the boom. In one incident, raftsmen "proceeded to destroy [the lumberjacks'] equipment, boats, cabin, and supplies. . . . Three loggers were injured by rifle fire" (pp. 358-359). The raftsmen also drove objects such as "old spikes, horseshoes, and other scrap metal into logs until it was hidden by the bark," Cox said. While undergoing processing in mills near the boom, the metal in the sabotaged logs damaged the teeth high-speed circular saws. But such retaliatory measures ultimately failed. So did state legislation to ban free-floating logs.

Meanwhile, Herdic and his partners stood fast. In fact, they enlarged the boom. At the time that they became majority stockholders in it, it could receive up to 200 million board-feet of logs. They altered it to receive up to 300 million board feet. (In the United States and Canada, a board foot is the volume of a board one foot long, one foot wide, and one inch thick. It contains 144 cubic inches. A board foot refers only to undried and unplaned wood stripped of its bark.)

The boom extended seven miles upriver. The gigantic structure jutted out from the river's south shore just above the western boundary of present-day Williamsport at an angle resembling the forward slash on a computer keyboard (/). The "slash" was

a chain of floating logs attached to supports (called cribs) anchored to the bottom of the river. This chain acted as a fence to keep the logs in place. “Records of the Susquehanna Boom Company report that the logs of the 1860s and 1870s averaged two hundred board feet [each]” (Taber, p. 404).

On the north shore of the western end of the boom was a long arm called a “sheer boom.” The operator of a windlass could move the arm in a semicircle on the river to guide logs drifting toward the north shore into the main boom (extending from the south shore) for storage. The sheer boom could be positioned to allow the passage of river traffic.

Before releasing trimmed logs into the river, each lumber company branded both ends of every log with a unique logo or symbol to indicate the company’s ownership. After the boom received and stored logs, young men and boys guided the ones bearing the same brand into a single group. They then tied the logs together to form a raft that they floated to a holding pond of a sawmill servicing the company that had branded the logs. The sawmill would cut them into rough boards and send them to a retailer or planing mill. Planing mills further refined boards to make them suitable for distribution to factories that manufactured wood products such as furniture, doors, moldings, window frames, and toys.

The boom was disassembled in the late autumn every year before ice formed on the river and prevented the flow of log traffic. It was reassembled in the spring.

After Herdic and his partners enlarged and stabilized the boom to resist the damaging effects of frequent floods, it could outperform any other structure of its kind. Other booms along the West Branch of the river could not compare with the size and efficiency of the Susquehanna Boom. Lewis Edwin Theiss has observed:

> The great Pennsylvania lumber industry . . . did not reach its maximum development until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the Williamsport boom was built. Then the world saw a growth that was almost inconceivable. Never before had there been anything like the lumber industry that came into being with the Williamsport log boom. . . . It was the largest boom ever made, and was in the heart of a region of tremendous forests, and was constructed at a time of enormous demand for timber. . . . (p. 399)

Citing figures listed in a chart in John Meginness's *History of Lycoming County*, Theiss also said:

> In 1862, 196,953 logs went through the Williamsport boom. These produced 87,863,621 board feet of lumber. Now notice the effect of the Civil War. By 1869, the

> logs numbered 1,060,511, and the lumber sawed totaled 223,060,065 board feet. The top year, apparently, was 1885. Then 1,850,951 logs went through the boom, and the lumber sawed totaled 225,847,555 board feet. (p. 405)

Herdic commandeered unbranded logs for processing in his mills. He also turned wood debris from violent storms and decaying logs into charcoal, used in blast furnaces to make iron. The unmarked logs and the charcoal substantially boosted boom profits. In 1876, George S. Banger wrote of the boom:

> The enhanced value of farms, timber lands and business enterprises of every kind and description, as well as the building up of towns and villages throughout this portion of the state is owing, in a very great measure, to the . . . Susquehanna boom for the massing of vast amounts of lumber from year to year and holding it securely preparatory to its manufacture at the various mills. In other words, it has directly encouraged the investment of millions of dollars of capital and afforded employment, together with the means of livelihood, to thousands of families. (p. 1)

In the winter, sawmill workers processed logs stored holding areas outside. Woodsmen, meanwhile, transported felled trees to the shores of river tributaries or to the shore of the river itself to await the spring thaw. The violent protests against the boom

eventually died out after raftsmen apparently realized that their old ways could not overcome new technology. They were like today's jobholders who fall victim to automation or artificial intelligence.

During these early years of his career, Herdic often lent money from his boom profits to almost anyone who asked for it, especially politicians and other persons of importance. Because their borrowing made them feel beholden to him, he gained enormous political clout in Williamsport, Harrisburg, and Washington. *The (New York) Sun* observed:

> His influence has been felt in the election of city and county officials, judges, members of the [state] legislature, state officers, congressmen, and United States senators. Though a professed Republican, he has manipulated both parties as his interests dictated. ("Story of," p. 4)

To maximize profits, he strong-armed the elected officeholders in Harrisburg into raising the fee charged for using the boom from fifty cents for a thousand feet to $1.25 ("Story of"). The legislators later lowered the fee to $1 after lumber companies complained.

Meanwhile, more sawmills rose along the river below the boom and on Loyalsock Creek. That tributary flowed into the Susquehanna at Montoursville, about five miles east of the

boom. Most of the sawmills in or near Williamsport used the latest equipment.

Fascinating Fact

Before the construction of the Susquehanna Boom, some West Branch lumbermen turned their cut timber into rafts, piloted them to Maryland towns around Chesapeake Bay, disassembled them, sold the wood, and then walked all the way back to north-central Pennsylvania—more than 300 miles. They stopped at inns and taverns along the way.

4 *A New Wife*

Having attained prominence as an entrepreneur, Herdic set his sights on an attractive and intelligent young woman with all the social graces, Encie Elizabeth Maynard, the daughter of a distinguished judge, John W. Maynard.

After studying law in New York State, Maynard settled in the town of Lawrenceville, Tioga County, Pa., where he became a respected attorney, according to John Meginness (Chapter 48). Nine years later, he moved to Williamsport to continue his law practice. In later years, Maynard served as a judge in western Pennsylvania and a president judge in eastern Pennsylvania, earning a reputation as an impeccably honest jurist with polished manners and an expert knowledge of the law. In Williamsport, he had schooled his daughter in elegant demeanor and saw to it that she received a good education in the liberal arts, including training that turned her into an accomplished pianist and organist.

How could Herdic—a rough-hewn bumpkin and a member of the upstart *nouveau riche*—hope to woo her? Consider that this young woman was said to be the leading socialite in the town's high society. Consequently, she appeared to be out of his reach. However, Herdic brought her within reach by hiring a tutor to school him (à la Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady*) in etiquette, concise speech, dancing, and the sophisticated ways

of the aristocrats. In a relatively short time, the tutor enculturated and gentrified Peter. The “new” Herdic then wooed Miss Maynard, proposed, got a yes, and married her on Jan. 12, 1860. Whether he was truly in love with Encie or simply saw her as an entrée into the rarefied climes of the Williamsport elite is arguable. Whatever the case, Peter and Encie seemed good for each other as time passed.

“She added grace and beauty to his mansion, and charmed his home life” (“Story of,” p. 4). “She filled his house with rare books . . . and from the abundant means of her husband, dispensed an elegant hospitality.”

She also bore him two children, Peter Jr. and Henry. Flora, the daughter of Herdic’s first wife, became their stepsister. Encie’s presence in her new husband’s elegant home on West Fourth St. no doubt made it one of the elite venues for soirées and other social events. Encie attended church regularly and gave time and money to the YWCA.

In 1872, she helped found the Woman’s Christian Association. Its purpose was twofold: (1) to bolster the material and spiritual welfare of needy and wayward young women, as well as orphaned and troubled children; and (2) to provide lodging for the young women and children until they could be placed in a home with a Christian family that would look after their welfare.

The association began operations in 1873 in a home on Pine St. and later moved to another home on Third St., according to local newspaper reports. After the numbers of the needy increased, the association decided to build a new, larger facility that would extend its help to elderly women. Peter Herdic donated a valuable parcel of land for the structure on Campbell St. between Park Ave. and Edwin St. On June 23, 1874, at the end of a fund-raising campaign, the group laid the cornerstone of the building in a special ceremony. Andrew Gregg Curtin, a former governor of Pennsylvania, was the guest speaker ("The Dedication," p. 4).

On May 4, 1876, when Encie Herdic was president of the association's board of directors, the completed building began operating as "the Home for the Friendless," using furnishings donated by local residents.

Flora Herdic involved herself in working with the occupants of the home. It appeared that destiny had chosen her to follow in her stepmother's footsteps as an upright, charitable member of the community.

The home was a success, although the organization encountered money problems from time to time and had to rely heavily on fundraisers and donations. Over the decades it evolved into what is now the Williamsport Home.

5 *Herdic on the Move*

As we have seen, in the first two decades of his residency in Williamsport, Herdic not only acquired a controlling share in the Susquehanna Boom, but he also gained influence over important politicians. However, he also catalyzed projects that affected the everyday lives of citizens in Williamsport and elsewhere in the region, usually for the better, while building his own wealth. He even served a term as mayor to help accomplish his goals. Following are examples of important activities and projects he undertook:

1. Urban transit. In the early 1860s, Peter Herdic was the prime mover in developing the Williamsport Passenger Railway. The River Valley Transit Authority, which oversees operations of today's Williamsport area bus system, outlined the early history of the railway in articles on its website.

First, after Herdic submitted the appropriate legal work, the state approved a charter creating the company in April 1863, allowing it to lay tracks for horse-drawn vehicles. While technicians were building the cars, they equipped each with a stove to warm passengers in cold weather.

Second, the route was established as follows:

> The original line of the Williamsport railway extended roughly 1.1 miles from Market St. west on Third Street

> to Pine and north on Pine to Fourth, then west on Fourth to the newly constructed Herdic House [hotel]. . . . The first streetcars were placed in service in 1865 in time for the State Fair held in Williamsport. ("The End of an Era")

Third, the first cars, pulled by two horses and seating twenty-six passengers, were found to be impractical economically and were replaced with sixteen-passenger cars pulled by one horse ("The Streetcar Era).

On the way up Fourth St., Williamsport passengers saw new Victorian mansions and Herdic-owned vacant land, perhaps dreaming of the day when they could afford to purchase a Herdic lot and build their own mansion. As the last stop on the uptown route and the starting point on the downtown route, Herdic's new hotel benefited financially from dinners served in its outstanding restaurants. Moreover, as one of the most luxurious lodging places in the East, built on five acres at the northwest corner of Campbell and West Fourth Sts., it profited from tourist and business visitors riding the streetcars from downtown locales. (Chapter 7 presents a detailed description of the Herdic House hotel.)

The Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* published a "Traveler's Guide" with the streetcar schedule (p. 3). Cars left the Herdic House hotel every fifteen minutes from 6:50 a.m, to 9:40 p.m., the newspaper said. Return trips from the eastern

terminus were also scheduled every fifteen minutes, from 7:10 a.m. to 10:10 p.m. The fare was five cents.

Utilities. Although Williamsport had a municipal gasworks, Herdic built his own facility near his hotel to keep its lights burning. Several years later, he purchased enough stock in the city's gasworks to gain control of it and merge it with his own.

After failing in an attempt to purchase the Williamsport Water Company, incorporated in 1853, he built his own waterworks. The water flowed through a pipe from a spring across the river. The new system served homes, the hotel, and other buildings in uptown Williamsport while providing enough water to extinguish fires in that section of the town.

Not long afterward, the two gas and two water utilities combined to form the Lycoming Gas and Water Co., with Herdic serving as a commissioner selling stock in it, according to the *Documentary History of American Water-works*. John Meginness included the history of gas, water, and other utilities in Williamsport in Chapter 21 of his *History of Lycoming County* under the heading "Water, Gas, Electric Light, and Steam Companies."

Lumberman's Bank. In the same year that Herdic completed the construction of his hotel, he opened the Lumberman's National Bank on Pine St., becoming its president, and two years later relocated it to the street immediately west of the

Herdic hotel. (Meginness Chapter 21.) In newspaper advertisements in the 1870s, he offered to finance new homes, presumably through the bank. One ad in the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, said in bold lettering, "Peter Herdic will build residences of any size, at any cost, for anyone" on real estate he owned. A customer was expected to pay one-third of the cost when the home was completed. The Lumberman's Bank would finance the remaining two-thirds. The least expensive homes were worth, in 2025 currency, $6,000 to $8,000—a bargain.

Herdic Park. In ca.1871, Herdic developed land north of High St. and west of Locust St. into what was first known as Herdic Park and later as Old Oaks Park. One of its main attractions was a half-mile, oval-shaped racetrack ("Herdic Park," p. 4). Horse races there drew thousands of visitors, many of whom traveled to Williamsport via the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad. It sold "excursion tickets" to Herdic Park to residents of nearby and distant towns along its route, including Corry (Erie County), Ridgway and St. Marys (Elk County), Emporium and Driftwood (Cameron County), Sinnemahoning (Cameron County), Renovo and Lock Haven (Clinton County), and other towns in Lycoming, Union, and Northumberland Counties ("Herdic Park Races," p. 4).

The park provided space for picnics, leisurely walks, fishing in a well-stocked trout pond, and other activities—even a military encampment set up in July 1872 for a militia charged with

preventing violence in a labor dispute involving sawmill workers. A writer for the *Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, which Herdic owned, observed on July 26, 1872:

> [The encampment] reminds one of scenes of . . . the advanced camp at Mechanicsville, five miles from Richmond, where lay quartered in a beautiful grove in 1862 the advance picket force of the right flank of McClellan's army. But here is the difference. The bold right of the Potomac army faced bristling bayonets and defiant cannon whilst those here encamped face 'good grub' without flinching. ("The Military," p. 4)

Elevation to City Status. To further develop Williamsport and gain recognition for it as an important lumber center, Herdic used his political muscle in 1865 to prod state legislators into creating a bill to elevate the town, then a borough, to city status. In January 1866, the Pennsylvania General Assembly approved the legislation and Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin signed an official charter empowering the provisions of the act, which:

> [Extended] the northern boundary line of the former borough of Williamsport in a straight line west to Lycoming creek; thence down said creek in a southerly direction, the several courses and distances, to the West Branch of the Susquehanna river; thence easterly along the northern bank of said river to the southwestern

> corner of the boundary of the former borough of Williamsport. (qtd. in Meginness, Chapter 21)

Annexation of Jaysburg, Newberry. The legislation also declared that settlements outside the boundary lines of Williamsport could petition the city to annex them if at least fifteen residents in any of the settlements approved annexation. However, independent-minded residents of Newberry and Jaysburg, situated on the other side of the city's western boundary (Lycoming Creek), prepared a petition requesting acceptance of their settlements as a single borough. They were still smarting from a state decision in 1796 designating Williamsport as the Lycoming County seat of government instead of Jaysburg, which had been the *de facto* seat after holding the first county court sessions and operating and staffing the first county jail. Having a long memory, they did not want to become part of Williamsport.

After they submitted a petition to become a borough to a grand jury empowered to investigate local issues, the jury voted against the move. Members of the Williamsport City Council were divided on the issue, having considered it previously without taking a stand.

On the sly, Herdic then duped S. C. Wingard, a local member of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, into believing that Jaysburg and Newberry residents supported annexation. Consequently, Wingard pushed through a bill to make the

settlements part of Williamsport, and the governor signed it ("Annexation"). Angry residents on the other side of the creek protested, to no avail.

Election as Mayor. In 1868, Herdic ran for mayor against attorney Henry C. Parsons, a prominent lawyer. One of the main issues in the contest was the condition of the streets, often muddy and mixed with horse manure. A pro-Herdic ad ("To the Independent Voters of the City of Williamsport") on page 3 of the *Williamsport Morning Standard* of May 19, 1868, told readers Herdic would lend the city enough money, at six percent interest, to remedy the problem. The ad said:

> The condition of the streets is a shame and disgrace to us. The mud in the principal streets [is] knee deep, the side gutters filled with frogs and lizards. . . . The health of the city is constantly endangered by the dampness and filth of the streets and gutters. Every medical man knows that fever and ague have their home residence in such localities, and that they can be removed or banished only by proper cleaning and drainage.

Diseases spawned by foul street conditions included cholera, dysentery, diarrhea, and typhoid fever. The incumbent mayor, Dr. William F. Logan—a Herdic opponent—declared in a letter to the editor next to the pro-Herdic ad that Herdic's plan to eliminate the problem was a scheme to make money at the expense of the Williamsport taxpayers. It also said, in part:

> If Mr. Herdic had so much the good of the entire city at heart in 1867, as he professes to have now . . . he could have well accomplished it without his election; as for the last two years he has had a majority of members of City Council to tacitly obey his behests as the steed yields to the rein of his rider.

During his campaign, Herdic's adversaries accused him of paying for votes. However, no damning evidence surfaced to prove the charge. He won the election, serving a two-year term (1869 and 1870) to carry out his plans.

Minnequa Springs. While overseeing municipal affairs, Herdic embarked on the construction of another hostelry, the Minnequa Springs Hotel and Spa, about forty miles north of Williamsport at the town of Canton, Bradford County, where he expected nearby mineral springs to attract visitors. When completed, it had space for up to 600 guests. The railroad connections to Canton from Williamsport, New York City, Washington, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other major cities were good.

The hotel was so successful that it drew wealthy vacationers from all over the eastern part of the country to "take the cure" at the springs, either by drinking the water or bathing in it. The sojourners could also enjoy boating, carriage rides on roads through the countryside, and long walks to view spectacular

scenery and breathe the clean country air. Some New Yorkers built cottages near the resort, allowing them to escape the hubbub and factory smoke of urban life—if only for a few weeks at a time.

On page 4 of the July 26, 1872, issue of the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, a reporter from the *Philadelphia Press* was quoted as saying,

> Its waters are remarkable. Minnequa Springs . . . has become celebrated throughout the country to an extent that no other resort has attained in so short a period. . . . To feel that a merciful Father in Heaven has so bountifully blessed us with all that can afford comfort, luxury, enjoyment, pleasure . . . with all that renders social and domestic life so happy and popular, that He has given us waters—living, pure water—to heal all our diseases.

It is true that water from mineral springs—whether hot or cold—*can* relieve the symptoms of some afflictions. Naturally occurring nutrients in the springs may ease muscle and tissue pain and alleviate the discomfort of psoriasis, acne, eczema, and other skin conditions. However, mineral springs cannot cure an ailment.

The Philadelphia Press correspondent said Peter Herdic's brother-in-law maintained that Peter himself had been suffering

from “a ringworm on the face and other scrofulous disorders, which were in his system from childhood.” But after drinking the spring waters, the *Press* writer said, Herdic noticed that all of his symptoms had disappeared. Moreover, the correspondent said, Herdic’s vitality and strength improved, and he gained twenty-six pounds.

However, given Herdic’s gift for manipulating facts to serve his purpose, *à la* P. T. Barnum, it is possible that the report was an exaggeration or fabrication to promote his resort. On the other hand, it could well have been true that Herdic did gain relief from the symptoms of a skin condition despite *The (New York) Sun’s* statement in Chapter 1 that he “never had a day of sickness in his life.” There can be no gainsaying, though, that the hotel enhanced the economic health of Canton—and Herdic’s. Not only did he reap profits from guests at the hotel, but he also made money selling bottled water via newspaper ads. On page 1 of the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* of Jan. 2, 1873, the text of one ad said that Minnequa Water had “the most salutary effects” in treating rheumatism, lung diseases, dyspepsia, “derangement of the liver,” and other afflictions.

The Minnequa hotel burned down in 1878, less than a decade after it was built. A second hotel then sprang up on the site of the first under new ownership. It continued to offer the amenities of the first hotel but achieved only modest success. A second fire consumed it in 1903. In an article published on Feb.

1, 2023, by the LeRoy (Pa.) Heritage Museum in Bradford County, eight miles east of Canton, Matthew Carl assessed the impact of Herdic's hotel and spa and the second, though less prosperous, hotel. He wrote:

> During the second half of the 19th century, Canton prospered. Existing businesses grew, new businesses started, buildings went up, farmers had a steady local market for their produce. During the summer season, the businessmen of the community were not only making money by supplying the hotel with food and supplies, but the hundreds of guests from the large cities who were staying there were visiting the borough and shopping in local stores. In the off season, the hotel employed local carpenters and painters to repair and expand the buildings.

Carl further noted that the population of the borough rose from 700 to 2,000 at the turn of the century, "due largely to the health resort of Minnequa Springs."

Development of South Side

In another venture, Herdic bought land at exorbitant prices on the south side of the Susquehanna River in what is now South Williamsport. Residents of Williamsport thought he was daft. The land was barren except for two tiny settlements, Rocktown and Bootstown.

These communities were hamlets at best. However, after building a bridge across the river, Herdic used his promotional skills to sell parcels for the construction of sawmills, planing mills, and other lumber-related businesses. Mills and factories rose, the population increased with the influx of job seekers, and the borough of South Williamsport came into being, absorbing Rocktown and Bootstown. Herdic himself had become a partner in one of the new mills, Sands, Herdic & Co., described in the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* of Oct. 13. 1873, as "one of the most solidly constructed and completely equipped in the West Branch Valley" (p. 4).

"He made enough money through the sale of his lots to reimburse him twice over," said *The (New York) Sun* ("Story of," p.4).

6 *The Sawdust War*

In the early 1870s, when the Susquehanna Boom produced huge profits for investors, the laborers in forests, on waterways, and in mills worked twelve hours a day for an average wage of $1.50, according to John Meginness (“Susquehanna Boom Company,” Chapter 21). That sum would amount to $40 in 2025 (*Dave Manuel.com*).

Clearly, the laborers were overworked and underpaid. They had to save every penny to support themselves and their families while the lumber barons lived in luxury. Where did Herdic stand in all this? His treatment of his own laborers on the boom, in sawmills, or on the real estate he owned, including forests, was probably fair. After all, he himself had experienced the travail of labor in the lumber industry as a young man. Moreover, after prospering in Williamsport, he provided unemployed laborers jobs in times of hardship and donated land or money to all needy citizens, regardless of social standing. As the Fall 1974 issue of the *Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society* observed:

> While he made thousands and tens of thousands by honest enterprise, he also gave back his thousands to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to elevate the standard of morality and religion in his gifts to benevolent and religious institutions, and to adorn the

> city with noble edifices and public and private improvements. (“The Story,” p. 14)

But if he was fair to his lumber employees, he did not take any precedent-setting action to raise their pay or shorten their workday to meet the standards suggested by lawmakers and union representatives.

What was the workday like for the men in the forests, on the river, and in the mills? Let's take a look at where they worked and what they did. Harvesting and processing pine and other types of wood required armies of workers in the dense forests, in Susquehanna tributaries, on the river itself, and in sawmills and planing mills.

Above the boom, “wood hicks”—a term ascribed to forest workers in Pennsylvania and West Virginia—felled the pine, hemlock, and oak trees. The men then stripped off the limbs and bark, sawed the trees into logs, branded each one, and transported the pine and hemlock to the river and the oak, too heavy to float, to a railroad car or a horse-drawn wagon for delivery to a mill or another destination.

Workers in the woods had to endure the vicissitudes of nature —extreme cold or heat, electrical storms, snow, ice, and mud. Accidents involving falling trees, rolling or sliding logs, sharp tools such as saws, and encounters with wildlife were commonplace. After the pine and hemlock logs floated into the

boom, river workers at its lower end near present-day Duboistown separated the logs with the same brand from the logs with different brands and ferried them to the appropriate mill along the river. Sawmills created rough-cut boards and planks. Planing mills turned them into smooth boards and planks for such products as doors, shutters, woodwork, molding, window frames, stands, racks, and even prefabricated houses. Some sawmills and planing mills were combined into a single processing center.

Forest workers shipped stripped tannin-containing bark (usually from hemlock trees) to tanneries. Tannin was a required ingredient in producing leather.

The workers on creeks and the river faced constant danger as they walked or jumped from one log to another or encountered a wayward log speeding toward them. Logjams posed the greatest threat to their safety. Workers had to enter a waterway to find and free the log or logs causing the jam, then hurry out before onrushing logs crushed them. Sometimes they had to explode dynamite at the source of a jam to loosen stubborn logs —a highly perilous job.

Williamsport had more than thirty sawmills along the river to process logs. “The typical [sawmill] was about sixty feet wide and 125 feet long, and employed ninety men in the mill and yard,” said Taber (p. 410).

Most sawmill owners required their employees to work long days, like their colleagues in the forests, despite an 1868 state law limiting the workday to a maximum of eight hours. (The Pennsylvania legislature had neglected to write enforcement provisions into the law. Consequently, it was widely ignored.)

Tired workers frequently suffered injuries from machines and bits of flying wood. Many of them developed lung problems from breathing dust all day. Workers caught in the moving parts of machines sometimes lost fingers or limbs. There was no workers' compensation to pay for medical treatment and lost wages. Nor were there death benefits. Workers in the planing mills faced similar dangers and also worked long hours for meager pay.

Until 1872, workers in the Williamsport lumber industry tolerated their treatment even though collectively they were the engine that drove Pennsylvania to become the top lumber producer in the country. The wealthy lumber barons, meanwhile, sat back and collected their millions. But in June of 1872, one group of laborers—the sawmill workers—rebelled in what came to be known as "The Sawdust War."

The catalyst that galvanized them into action was the State Labor Reform Convention, held in May at the Lycoming County Courthouse in Williamsport by union representatives. This was a time when labor unions were forming throughout the United States, partly in response to the establishment in the

previous decade of the National Labor Union in Baltimore to lobby for congressional approval of a mandated eight-hour workday (“Founding,” para. 1).

After mingling with the state reformers and holding meetings of their own, most of the Williamsport sawmill men walked off the job—in effect, forming their own union—to demonstrate their demand for what they wanted even more than a pay raise: a workday of no more than ten hours. They had the backing of workers in other industries. “Ten-hour day or no sawdust” was the slogan the strikers shouted in demonstration on the streets of the city.

By July 1, hundreds of mill men were on strike. The action infuriated the local chapter of the Lumberman’s Exchange, made up of wealthy owners seeking to protect their interests. Their position was that the treatment of workers in local sawmills was equal to, or better than, the treatment of sawmill workers in other lumbering regions. Peter Herdic, however, was not a member of the exchange. Perhaps he believed at the time of its formation earlier in the year that it would suggest to the workers that they were little more than puppets to be manipulated on the strings of the wealthy. When the walkout occurred, he saw that the sympathies of workers in other industries, both men and women, seemed to be on the side of the strikers.

"The lumber strike went beyond Williamsport to affect other West Branch communities," wrote Nathan Gilbert in a Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* article that was republished, in part, in the 2003 *Journal of the Lycoming County Historical Society*. He further observed:

> By Saturday, July 6, as many as three hundred men of Lock Haven were on strike too. Lock Haven strikers joined with the Williamsport strikers that morning for a parade through Williamsport. Two mills in the city had begun running on the ten-hour system; the other mills were operating with only a quarter of their usual crew. (p. 18)

Even though hundreds of thousands of logs crammed the Susquehanna Boom awaiting processing at the mills, the Lumberman's Exchange refused to yield to the workers' demand.

Meanwhile, Mayor Seth W. Starkweather, himself a mill owner, closed liquor outlets to preempt violence by drunken strikers. By mid-July, Herdic and a few other sawmill owners had declared their support for a ten-hour day. Consequently, a full complement of their employees kept their mills running.

The possibility of a substantial loss of profits at other mills loomed, but the Lumberman's Exchange continued to hold firm to its position. Fights then broke out between roaming workers

and police guarding the sawmills. On July 21, the strikers went on a rampage. Thomas W. Lloyd observed:

> The mob visited the Otto and Filbert mill where all men working more than ten hours were ordered off the premises. The policemen who were on duty drew their revolvers and advanced on the crowd, but were met by a shower of stones and bricks, which compelled them to retire. The crowd then moved to the Reading, Fisher and Company mill where rioting was resumed. On that day Chief of Police Coder nearly had his arm broken, Officer Piatt nearly had his clothes torn off, Officer Stryker was hit twice by a club thrown at him, and other special officers on duty in various sections of Williamsport received injuries of a more or less serious character. (p. 587)

Some strikers also attacked mill owners. Injuries to non-striking workers from crowbars, spikes, and other weapons required emergency medical treatment. Although gunshots were fired, there were no reports of injuries from them. At the request of Sheriff Samuel Van Buskirk, the state mobilized more than hundreds of members of the Pennsylvania Militia, including members from Harrisburg, Lebanon, Middletown, Lock Haven, and Williamsport, to face down and disperse the workers, said the July 23 issue of the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* (p. 4). On July 27, additional forces arrived from Sunbury, Shamokin, and Mill Hall, according to

Frederick A. Godcharles, a prominent historian and director of Pennsylvania's state library and state museum (qtd. in Diener, *Susquehanna Footprints*).

The militiamen quelled the uprising. Twenty-seven of the strikers were arrested and jailed. On July 31, authorities released them on bail to await trial in a local court.

In September, Judge James Gamble sentenced twenty-one rioters to short terms in the county jail and the four strike leaders—Thomas Greevy, editor of the *Williamsport Reform Journal* and secretary of the state labor reformers; Thomas Blake; James Bermingham; and A. J. Whitten—to one-year terms in the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia.

Two thousand Williamsport citizens supporting the workers sent a petition to Harrisburg asking Governor John W. Geary to take executive action on behalf of the strikers. Herdic urged the governor to pardon the imprisoned men, Godcharles reported. It so happened that Geary, who had served as a Civil War general and the first mayor of San Francisco, owed Herdic a favor and granted his request. The strike ended.

The mill crews lost their bid for shorter workdays, but—as previously noted—several owners, including Herdic, had acted on their own to grant a shortened workday. It was a small step forward. Moreover, the strikers had planted a seed that would one day come to fruition after labor unions gained recognition.

The first successful lumber unions in the U.S. formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. James Kennedy, a writer for the Industrial Workers of the World, said,

> The first lumber workers' union of which we have any record was organized at Eureka, Calif., in 1884. Six months later it took out a charter in the Knights of Labor, and soon gained a membership of over two thousand. ("Past Battles," Chapter 10, para 1)

One can only speculate on why Herdic supported the Williamsport strikers. Was he truly concerned about their life in the mills? Did he believe failure to act on their behalf would trigger long-lasting rancor toward him by citizens whose cooperation he needed to carry out future projects? Did he fear that a long strike would result in an intolerable loss of profits from the boom and the mills?

It is likely that Herdic, who knew poverty as a child and had once worked in sawmills, did empathize with the strikers. He understood what it was like to work long days while breathing sawdust and risking serious injury. He had also demonstrated his concern for the struggling labor classes through his charitable activities.

But, of course, he was well aware that he depended on substantial profits to support his projects and follow his

dreams. In particular, his construction of a large building the length of a city block was already under way between West Edwin and West Fourth Sts. east of Campbell St. to house offices, retail outlets, an opera house, and other enterprises. It would require a continuous flow of money to complete. And then there was the cost of upkeep and payrolls for the Herdic House hotel and the Minnequa Springs Hotel and Spa.

In the end, no one can say with certainty why he did what he did. Perhaps even he himself did not fully understand his motives.

Fascinating Fact

Eastern white pine trees can live to a ripe old age of well over 400 years. However, the typical tree lasts for 200 years or so. It is possible that undisturbed white pines still standing in Pennsylvania and other states were already more than a hundred years old when American colonists revolted against the British Crown. Eastern white pines surrounded Williamsport when Peter Herdic arrived in the town in 1853.

7 *Prosperity Breeds Prosperity*

With the money flowing in from forest harvests, investors began establishing more lumber-related enterprises: furniture factories, tanneries, retail lumber outlets, and machining and toolmaking concerns, attracting newcomers to work in them.

The influx of skilled and unskilled laborers, as well as new faces from the world of finance, created a demand for still more new businesses, such as food and clothing stores, shoe shops, restaurants, apothecaries, distilleries, and hardware stores. Herdic himself was the part-owner of a downtown dry-goods store, Herdic and Company ("Story of," p. 22). He also invested in nail, brush, and rubber factories ("O, for a Peter Herdic," p. 6). The buildings housing new businesses were made mostly of wood, of course, for frames, floors, stairways, walls, and so on.

Railroads required increasing supplies of wood to build freight cars and install ties on expanding routes. Tanneries needed a constant supply of the tannin-containing bark of hemlock and other trees to meet the demand for leather products, including saddles, bridles, upholstery, shoes, boots, belts, jackets, and pocketbooks. Two new tanneries were built in Williamsport in the 1870s. J. K. Mosser of Allentown built the larger one, the Lycoming Tannery, in 1876 in the Newberry section of the city (Meginness, Chapter 21). It occupied about fourteen acres and

used 12,000 to 15,000 railroad carloads of tree bark each year (Chapter 21). The tannery specialized in making sole leather for shoes and was said to be the largest of its kind in the world (Chapter 21). After Mosser appointed his son Henry to manage the tannery, it changed its name to J. K. Mosser & Company and became a mainstay industry in the city past the mid-twentieth century.

In 1878, John Crawford, who had maintained a leather business in nearby Warrensville since 1860, built the smaller tannery in the city near the junction of two railroads, John Meginness said. The proximity to the railroads apparently made it easy for Crawford's employees to unload carloads of bark. A third tannery, that of George Slate & Son, had already been operating in Williamsport for decades.

After tanneries ground up the hemlock bark, they added water to make a "soup." They then immersed hides from cattle, goats, pigs, and other animals into the mixture to remove impurities and retard decay.

Investors also founded important machining companies in Williamsport in the 1870s to serve the lumber-related industries. One was Millspaugh, Rowley & Millspaugh, which was in operation by 1872, according to an internet site, *Vintage Machinery* ("Millspaugh"). Rowley (Edwin A.) left the company in 1875 to join with Albert D. Hermance to form the machining company of Rowley & Hermance. The Millspaugh

brothers, Thomas and John, remained in business and in 1882 changed the firm's name to the Williamsport Machine Company. The company serviced sawmills and repaired engines at its Hepburn St. facility, according to *Vintage Machinery*, and also manufactured woodworking machinery. By 1882, it had a workforce of up to 100 men.

Rowley & Hermance, meanwhile, began operations on West Third St. but moved to larger facilities in 1877 at Canal and Basin Sts. in Williamsport, Meginness reported in Chapter 21, and employed up to 180 workers. The operation made woodworking machinery for manufacturers of doors and other wood products, including furniture. It also made tools for shipment around the world.

Meginness also provided the following information about Rowley and Hermance in Chapter 21.

Rowley, a native Lewis County, N.Y., studied machining in Michigan before settling in Williamsport in 1868 to practice his trade. Over the years, he served as president of the National Furniture Company, the Edison Electric Illuminating Company, and the of the Self-Locking Buckle Suspender Company. He was also a director of, or stockholder in, other companies and owned a farm. As a fabulously wealthy resident of the city, he built a magnificent home on West Fourth St. which now stands as one of the finest examples of Queen Anne architecture in Pennsylvania.

Hermance, a native of Saratoga County, N.Y., and a Civil War veteran, had worked in Williamsport from 1865 to 1868 for Culver, Barber & Company, a manufacturer of sash, doors, and blinds. He then managed a large blind factory at Green Island, N.Y., and returned to Williamsport four years later. Meginness further wrote:

> [He] took charge of [a] planing mill. . .which position he occupied one year. He also had charge of the American Match Stick Company for a short time. In the meantime he had originated a woodworking machine, which he patented in the spring of 1873, and then commenced manufacturing his patent. He traveled through the State introducing and selling his machine, and had a gratifying success. . . . He [was] the originator of the Hermance Chemical Company and . . . a stockholder in the Otto Chemical Company, the plants of which [were] in McKean county. (Chapter 21)

The New York Times noted that Hermance established a scholarship fund at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., for worthy applicants from Williamsport High School ("$400,000 Fund").

An already-existing machining company—the Snyder Brothers, founded ca. 1850—thrived during the lumber era, providing patented products for industries in north-central

Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the United States ("Snyder Brothers").

Its proprietors—George S., Henry F., and Andes Snyder—manufactured equipment for sawmills, shingle mills, and businesses requiring steam-powered machines ("Snyder Brothers"). They displayed their products at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia from May 10 to Nov. 10, 1876, held to showcase the nation's industrial and technological advancement and to celebrate the 100th anniversary of America's Declaration of Independence. The exhibition attracted more than nine million visitors from the U.S. and other countries.

The Williamsport *Daily Morning Standard* wrote about the importance of the machining companies in its issue of May 13, 1872. It said:

> Probably a very small proportion of the people in Williamsport are fully aware of the extent of the manufactures here of machinery for other other places. Nearly every state in the Union is represented in the order books of our manufacturers. As a little illustration, last week Snyder Brothers shipped a full set of machinery for a steam sawmill to Stone Mountain, Georgia, and they have now in process of manufacture a turntable for the Lake Shore and Michigan Railroad, to be placed at Kendalville, Indiana; another for the

> Pennsylvania Railroad to go to Springdale, Pa.; another for the Union Passenger Railroad at Philadelphia; a 150 horsepower directing steam gauge for the Keystone Lumber and Saw Company, of Wenono, Michigan; a flat gang for Lathrop, Insho & Co., Saginaw, Michigan; a 100 horsepower steam engine, for the Milton, Pa., rolling mill—and so on. (p. 4)

Toolmakers and hardware dealers in the city found ready buyers for hand saws, axes, hammers, chisels, mattocks, wedges, branding irons, and peaveys and pike poles to manipulate or guide logs on water. At least one company, E. Andrews & Sons, made specialized saws such as one- and two-man cross-cut saws to rip across wood grain, circular saws to replace the up-and-down reciprocating saws in mills, saws to cut wooden shingles for roofs and siding, and gang edgers to smooth and straighten the sides of a board, Meginness said in Chapter 21.

The lumber industry required wainwrights and wheelwrights to build and repair wagons that transported logs to riverbanks, railroad cars, or nearby sawmills. The horses pulling the loads needed farriers to shoe them and saddlers to make reins, harnesses, bits, blinders, and other tack.

Construction of buildings in Williamsport, including churches and the Victorian mansions, required architects, draftsmen, and excavators to do the preparatory work and tradesmen to build,

outfit, and maintain them. These workers included carpenters, carvers, stone masons, joiners, bricklayers, glaziers, plumbers, plasterers, tile setters, tinsmiths, cabinetmakers, locksmiths, stained-glass craftsmen, roofers, house painters, sculptors, landscapers, gardeners, blacksmiths to make wrought iron fences and household objects, and haulers to deliver materials.

After wealthy families occupied the mansions, they hired maids, butlers, cooks, carriage drivers, and other servant staff, including immigrants from Ireland and other countries.

New houses of worship in the city required heavy wooden pews, some having elaborate carvings. Wood was also used to build roofs, framework, altars, pulpits, and lecterns. At the northwest corner of West Fourth St. and what is now Trinity Place, Herdic erected Trinity Episcopal Church with $80,000 of his own money and $15,000 provided by church members, who had been assembling for services in a chapel on nearby Vine Ave. Architect Fred Thorne began the project, but Eber Culver finished it (“History,” para 4).

With its soaring steeple (designed by Culver), the height of the beautiful Gothic church was well over 200 feet, making it the tallest building in the city. Herdic’s father-in-law, Judge Maynard, donated a set of nine bells to the church. They were the first in America to sound the Westminster Quarters (also called the Westminster Chimes), as rung by the Palace of Westminster in London. The bells, weighing 8,500 pounds,

were made in Boston by E. Howard & Company. Today, they continue to ring at every quarter-hour ("History").

Herdic also donated land at the northwest corner of West Fourth and Walnut Sts. for the construction of a magnificent Roman Catholic church—the Romanesque Church of the Annunciation, designed by architect Amos Wagner—with a seating capacity of 1,000. Many of its parishioners were of Irish ancestry—immigrants, or children and grandchildren of immigrants, who left Ireland to escape famine or repressive British laws. Some of them worked in the lumber industry.

Like Trinity, Annunciation was completed in Herdic's lifetime. It was one of the few large houses of worship in Pennsylvania that did not require pillars inside to support expansive roofing. In addition, Herdic provided free parcels of land for First Evangelical Lutheran Church, a Congregational church, and, as previously mentioned, the Baptist church founded through the efforts of his first wife. He also donated money to help build a synagogue, Temple Beth Ha Sholom (House of Peace), in the downtown.

In 1873, Herdic made an important investment to support the development of Williamsport and his various projects: the purchase of *The Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, a morning newspaper. Since 1869, he had held a controlling interest in it. Before that year, it was an organ of the Democratic Party. Afterward, it became an organ of the Republican Party. It

unabashedly promoted Herdic's special interests—and for good reason, his supporters would argue, because the other major newspaper in town (the *Daily Morning Standard*, which supported the Democratic Party) incessantly criticized him and his projects as well as the Republican Party in general. But Herdic had outspoken defenders. One of them—identified only by his initials, C.J.J.—expressed his views in Herdic's paper, the *Daily Gazette and Bulletin of* May 17, 1870. Here is an excerpt from his comments:

> Now one word to you gentlemen who oppose . . . every other scheme in which Peter Herdic is interested. Let me ask how many there are of you who can pass up and down Fourth Street, on one of those lovely spring days, and not feel a sense of pride that you have in this growing and beautiful city? Many of you who complain at having to pay a few dollars for paving and beautifying the streets, opening avenues, draining [streets] and otherwise adding to the health and prosperity of the town have been made rich by the increased value of your property. (p. 4)

As Williamsport continued to grow, it opened entertainment centers downtown to attract famous performers, actors, and speakers to amuse and educate the populace. Shows at such venues as the Ulman Opera House, at the southeast corner of East Third and Market Sts., featured minstrels, dancers, opera singers, and well-known actors performing in stage dramas and

comedies. In 1869, Mark Twain appeared at the Ulman to deliver a humorous address about his visit to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii). Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody played themselves in a stage drama at the Ulman—*Scouts of the Plains*, by Fred G. Maeder—in 1873. Cody returned to Williamsport fourteen more times to present Wild West shows on vacant fields ("Did Buffalo").

Occasionally, a circus would come through, arriving by train and parading through town, then performing under a tent. And, of course, there were conventions, attracted to the city by good railroad connections and by Williamsport's reputation as a lumber center with grand Victorian homes and enough hotel rooms to accommodate hundreds of guests.

The Pennsylvania Agricultural Society met in the city between Sept. 26 and 29, 1865, to hold an exhibition on land owned by Peter Herdic. He opened the doors of his new Herdic House hotel, completed in the same year, to members wishing to lodge there.

The Pennsylvania Editorial Association—with members from big cities and small towns—met in Williamsport in June 1871. J. K. Durborrow, an editor for the *Huntingdon Journal*, described what he saw in the June 21 issue of the *Journal* as his train approached Williamsport from the west:

> The country along the West Branch is open and very fertile. The wheat appeared to be very fine and gives promise of a . . . heavy yield. On we went, skimming along through splendid farms, over little rivulets on the margin of the river, under overhanging cliffs . . . . Williamsport with its great boom, its scores of mills, its square acres of lumber, its splendid churches and other edifices, its magnificent residences, and its Herdic House [hotel] came into view. Down went the brakes [at the hotel station] and the great throng poured out of the cars to enter the greater throng already at that tower of babel. The . . . register was in demand for the next fifteen minutes. (p. 2)

Their first activity was to take a boat ride on the river to see the Susquehanna Boom, the sawmills, the planing mills, the busy factories, and the rich forestland surrounding the city.

"Three small steamers had been prepared by Peter Herdic . . . for our reception," Durborrow said (p. 2).

During their eight-mile ride up the river—accompanied by Herdic—the editors saw hundreds of thousands of logs floating in the gigantic boom to await their trip to sawmills. They toured several of the noisy mills, observing circular or perpendicular saws slicing timber into boards, then boards into laths, "all in just five minutes," Durborrow said, obviously

impressed. After lunch at the Herdic House, he and others in his company went on another short jaunt.

> [We] took the streetcar . . . down by some of the finest residences in the state. . . .We spent an hour or more looking in upon the flower gardens and beautiful lawns surrounding residences of the wealthy. (p. 2)

The Huntingdon group then joined with conventioneers lodged at other local hotels to assemble in the afternoon in Elliot's Academy of Music, part of a building on the southwest corner of Pine and West Fourth Sts.. It was the same place where the Pennsylvania Democratic Party held its convention a decade later. The proprietor of the academy, W. G. Elliot, promoted it with ads touting the city's accessibility by railroad and the availability of outstanding hotels, "the Herdic House being one of the finest and most attractive in the state" (Elliot's).

Herdic, whom Durborrow called "the Prince of Entrepreneurs," delivered a welcoming address. Several attendees read essays on the newspaper trade, and officers of the association conducted their business. Afterward, the Huntingdon group retired to the Herdic House to partake of a savory dinner, including "capons and pork and beans dressed with mushrooms," Durborrow said (p. 2).

State labor, religious, political, and other organizations also held conventions in Williamsport. Attendees lodged at city

hotels, holding their meetings there or at the courthouse, churches, Elliot's Academy, and other venues.

Fascinating Fact

In 1870, the U.S. Census Bureau listed Williamsport as one of the top 100 most populous cities in the country, with 16,030 residents. It was right behind Omaha, Neb., with 16,083.

8 *Herdic House Hotel*

In 1865, Peter Herdic completed the construction of one of the best resort hotels in the East, the Herdic House, at 800 West Fourth St. in Williamsport. The building sat proudly on five acres at the northwest corner of Campbell and West Fourth Sts. Herdic had told his architect, Eber Culver, to spare no expense in its construction. The hotel and the growing number of mansions on West Fourth served as striking tourist attractions. Visitors had something to talk about when they returned home.

The hotel had four stories and room enough for seven hundred guests, although on special occasions it could accommodate five hundred more who were willing to sleep on cots, said the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* of Aug. 2, 1871 (p. 4). White pine was the main wood species used in the construction of the hotel ("The History of "). The brick structure measured 156 feet on each side to form a perfect square.

To register in the lobby or meander through hallways, guests walked on marble tiles quarried in nearby Mosquito Valley. Steam heating kept the hotel warm and cozy. Herdic and his wife maintained an apartment in the building, probably used mostly for social gatherings and business meetings. The Herdic House became *the* place to stay in the city, whether for a night or several weeks. The building offered all the amenities expected of a superior hostelry—an elegant restaurant with

food prepared by expert chefs, two dining rooms, a cigar stand, a bar, an ice cream parlor, a newsstand, a telegraph office, a large room with a stage for theatrical presentations, a barbershop, reading and reception rooms, beautifully appointed bedrooms and family suites, fireplaces, hot and cold running water, and a room for washing clothes.

Crystal chandeliers hung from ceilings. Expansive verandas lined the center of each side of the hotel to enable guests to relax in the fresh air. Within the middle of the building was a courtyard (“Herdic's Hotel”).

Guests could compete with one another in two billiard parlors or dance to the latest waltzes in a ballroom. Outside, flower gardens bloomed in the warmer months, and deer roamed the fenced-in lawns. A fountain splashed with calming sounds. Oak and evergreen trees provided shade. Sojourners strolled its grounds or moseyed down West Fourth St. to see newly constructed mansions and their verdant gardens.

When attorney Benjamin Stuart Bentley—a native of Montrose, Pa.—was relocating to Williamsport in 1866 to practice law, he lodged at the Herdic House on his first night in town. He wrote home to his wife about the accommodations:

> The rooms are of good size and finely furnished. Each room has a most beautiful cottage-bed, marble top bureau, wash stand, & cane seat arm chairs and rockers.

> . . In each room [is] a center table, side lights and chandeliers. I have in my room, a beautiful walnut lounge. . . .The view from the windows is fine and everything in and about the house conducive to comfort. (“Historical Sketches”)

North of the hotel, guests could attend a game at the Union Baseball Grounds. The facility welcomed African-American players as well as white. The Herdic House had its own team, the Independents, made up of black waiters and a black coach named Enoch Emory (Brunson, p. 431). Of Emory, Mark E. Eberle wrote in “Crossing Baseball's Color Line”:

> Censuses and city directories listed Enoch as a waiter, headwaiter, or cook in Williamsport, where he also operated a catering business. Local newspapers praised his skills. Enoch’s staff at the [Herdic House] hotel sometimes included his sons—William, Javan, and Sims—who also assisted with the catering business. The sons continued in their father’s footsteps, working as hotel waiters . . . head-waiters, and porters in Williamsport and other cities. In addition, Enoch and his sons were associated with the organization of Black baseball teams in Williamsport, adding substance to the association of early Black baseball with hotel employees.

Wittingly or unwittingly, Herdic thus helped to exhibit the skills of black baseball players and advance their right to compete against white players.

Two former Philadelphians experienced in hotel management managed the day-to-day operations of the hotel. Herdic himself became involved in menu preparations after he visited lumbermen in a forest while they were cooking shad over an open fire. The fish rested on planks of aromatic wood to smoke it, enhancing its flavor. Native Americans, including the Lenni Lenape of Pennsylvania, had prepared shad this way in preceding centuries (Diltz). Herdic thought it was delicious. Thereafter, planked shad became a popular dish on the hotel's menu. Guests often took the recipe for it home to make their own versions of the dish.

Among dignitaries and celebrities who booked rooms at the hotel was Jay Cooke, probably the most important American banker in the 1860s. An abolitionist, he sold $3 billion in war bonds to support the Union cause during the Civil War, earning him recognition from General Ulysses S. Grant as the "savior of the Union."

Cooke liked the Williamsport area so much that he built a hunting and fishing lodge along Larrys Creek, near the small Lycoming County village of Salladasburg, and visited it often until his death in 1905.

After Herdic routed his streetcars to stop at the hotel, he entreated the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad, a lessee of the Pennsylvania Railroad, to relocate its downtown station to a tract of land behind his new hotel, land that he would donate. The railroad accepted his offer. After the station was completed, travelers could walk to the hotel in minutes under a roofed colonnade to check in for a room or grab a quick meal in a basement dining room before resuming a trip.

In later years, ownership of the building passed through many hands under the name “Park Hotel.” In the late 1930s, then-owner William B. Stuart decided to turn it into a home for elderly women (Crossley, p. 30). To do so, Stuart had to remove the top two stories to meet state fire codes that limited the height of such facilities. In 1940, Stuart reopened the altered structure as the “Park Home” (p. 30).

When I was growing up, my family lived near the Park Home —first on Vine Ave., then West Edwin St., then West Fourth St., and then in 1950 at the foot of Sixth Ave., near the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks. Every schoolday after that, I walked to Saint Joseph's School via Nichols Place and Edwin St. to attend classes. Along the way, I passed the railroad passenger station and the Park Home.

After school, I sometimes stopped at the station, on Nichols Place at the foot of Trinity Place, to purchase a refreshment—maybe a cherry phosphate or a chocolate bar—from its soda

fountain, then sat for a spell on one of the long benches inside or outside to watch people coming and going. From the ticket counter in front of a big wall clock that kept the exact time, travelers could buy a trip to anywhere in the country. At a magazine rack, they could purchase the latest issue of *Time, Look, Life*, *Coronet*, or *Reader's Digest* to take onto the train.

This was the same railroad station at which President McKinley's funeral train stopped on its way to Washington in 1901 after he died from the wound of an assassin's bullet in Buffalo, N.Y. Aboard were McKinley's widow, members of his cabinet, and the new president, Teddy Roosevelt.

It was the same station that England's King George VI and his wife, the Queen Consort Elizabeth, who was the mother of Queen Elizabeth II, stopped at in 1939 during a journey from Canada to Washington D.C. Before their trip, no British monarch had ever visited the United States.

And it was the same station that greeted celebrities in the late 1800s when they traveled to Williamsport to attend social gatherings organized by Anne Weightman Walker, a Williamsport resident destined to become the wealthiest woman in the world in the early years of the twentieth century. She hosted social events either at the Herdic House hotel or other venues, including her spacious mansion at 1005 West Fourth St.

I remember the day when President Harry Truman stopped at the station in the early 1950s to deliver a political speech from a platform on the back of a train. It was a big deal to me, for it was the first time I had ever seen an American president in person. There was a large crowd, and I had to bully through it to get a view from near the tracks. I do not remember whether I had any idea of the meaning of his words, but I do remember that I knew he was the man who ended World War II by authorizing the explosion of atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.

In later years, the Park Home gradually deteriorated to the point that it became vacant. Williamsport officialdom in the 1990s called for its demolition. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission then listed it as one of the top ten "endangered historical structures" in the state (Morningstar).

But early in the twenty-first century, three prominent citizens—the late U.S. congressman and attorney Allen Ertel, architect Anthony H. Visco Jr., and William Brown—stepped in to save it. Under the expert guidance of Visco, they restored it to pristine condition and renamed it Park Place. Today, the building provides office space, apartments, and rooms for special events and gatherings, including business meetings, parties, reunions, bridal showers, and wedding receptions ("History"). The continued presence of the building as one of the masterpieces of Williamsport architecture remains as a reminder of the city's glorious past.

And what of the railroad station? In 1968, after the PRR merged with the New York Central Railroad to become the Penn Central, the station continued to serve the city until 1971. At that time, the Penn Central decided to end service to the city because of mounting debt, failure to upgrade the condition of tracks on its routes, retention of unused property for which it was still paying taxes, and rivalries between the managers of the merged railroads. Former customers then began using buses, airplanes, or their own cars to travel long distances. Eventually, the railroad went bankrupt. After the local passenger station closed, it was used mainly as a storage facility until a fire gutted it in 1979.

In the early 1980s, when I wrote editorials and a weekly column for *GRIT*—a Williamsport newspaper that moved to the Midwest in the 1990s—I "eulogized" the old station in one of my columns. For Williamsporters today who never read *GRIT* and never saw the station or the brawny steam locomotives and diesel engines when they pulled in or out with carloads of passengers, I am repeating that column here.

The Old Railroad Station

Let's see. The old Pennsylvania Railroad Station used to be here, where I'm standing, and there were always interesting people inside waiting for a train. Tall people, short people, skinny people, fat people. The very old and the very young.

Soldiers, businessmen, college students, ladies in furry finery, bums. The alpha and the omega of humanity.

“But I don't want to go to Buffalo,” a little boy would shout, kicking his father in the shins.

The old railroad station. It used to be here, at the foot of Trinity Place, and there wasn't a better station anywhere. Today, though, there's nothing here but weeds and a piercing November chill. Seems to me there ought to be something here, at least a marker. Here's what I would have it say:

> Once a great railroad station occupied this spot. It was a place where simple hellos and good-byes became poems of human emotion. For fully a century, it was the city’s main link to the outside world.

But there's nothing here now, nothing but those weeds and the November chill. I used to visit the old station almost every day on my way home from school. What I liked most about it was the hustle and bustle: everybody was going somewhere or coming home from somewhere—except me. I came to watch.

“All the world's a stage,” Shakespeare wrote, and he was right.

I felt sorry for the sad people standing by a window waiting for someone who never came, or heading out the door after saying good-bye to someone who would never come back. I could

always pick the sad people out of the crowd. They were the ones with the nervous hands and the eyes with the melancholy gleam. Once in a while, though, I had the privilege of watching a family greeting someone who did come back—maybe a soldier from war. Usually, it was a little sister or brother who ran out first to welcome the hero home while the mother and father pondered the meaning of the moment before rushing over to embrace him.

On a slow day, when there weren't many people to watch, I'd mosey out to the tracks through one of the swinging doors, which flapped three times after you pushed them. Always three. I don't know why that was, but it was.

Sometimes I was lucky enough to see a big steam locomotive resting, catching its breath—a snorting behemoth that ate coal, belched steam, and spouted black plumes to the heavens. So thick with cinders were these clouds that I've no doubt fat pigeons could perch on them and ride them to the ground. What a wonderwork of mechanical wizardry a locomotive was, like a Swiss watch raised to the 2,000th power. Behind the great black machine was a long row of cars, stretching even to the horizon, with passengers staring out the windows at nothing in particular. Who were they? Where were they going?

As the porters loaded the mailbags and suitcases and as the conductor shouted "All aboard!" the monstrous, snorting, belching wonderwork of metal—575,000 pounds of sheer pull

power—would spin its wheels and jerk forward, jolting every connected car behind in one long and glorious chain reaction. And a whole train of people, a whole train of untold stories, would move on. There used to be a railroad station in this place. Let's see. The wooden benches were here . . . .

9 *Hard Times*

The exact worth of Peter Herdic in money and property at any given time was difficult to calculate. Estimates ranged well into the millions, but accurate figures to tally his net worth were elusive. Here is why: the precise value of his land, buildings, businesses, stocks, and bonds depended on economic conditions and other variables. Unlike the money in bank accounts—summed up to the penny in neat columns—the value of Herdic's holdings tended to rise and fall with economic trends.

One thing is sure: his oversight of his income and outgo was not conservative. He believed that reinvesting his profits in promising opportunities—or even borrowing money against his possessions to pay for a seductive venture—was the key to growth and prosperity for himself and the city he was building. Lady Fortune smiled on him most of the time.

Perhaps she was amused by his penchant for taking risks and his manipulation of lawmakers to get his way in projects requiring government approval at the local, state, or federal level. In fact, his ability to exploit politicians paid him large dividends. But his clever tactics sometimes damaged his reputation and pricked his conscience, causing him to donate money or property to the needy.

On one occasion in the late 1860s, he pulled the strings of his marionette city council to gain approval of a $600,000 contract for him to install Nicholson pavement (wooden blocks) on part of West Fourth St. (“Story of, ” p. 4). Among the touted advantages of the pavement was that it reduced roadway bumpiness and lessened the noise of horse traffic. *The (New York) Sun* commented on the outcome of the project:

> He fulfilled the contract to the letter, and undoubtedly realized a large profit, besides enhancing the value of his land in the upper part of the city. The people were as pleased with the pavement as a child with a new toy until they awoke to the unpleasant reality that it was worn out and the debt wasn’t.” (“Story of, p. 4”)

Nicholson pavement had been installed on some streets in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, London, Paris, and other cities. But the wooden blocks tended to decay after several years of exposure to rain, snow, ice, and horse traffic.

Replacing the blocks and maintaining them was costly. Moreover, horses often slipped on them when the weather slicked the streets. However, because it was a relatively new type of pavement in the U.S., Herdic may have been unaware of its flaws. Nevertheless, his reputation suffered after local residents bore the burden of paying for it. To restore the citizenry’s faith in him, or to demonstrate genuine concern for

the residents, he used his resources to improve their welfare. *The (New York) Sun* observed:

> With all his faults and foibles, Herdic has undoubtedly been the cause of most of the prosperity Williamsport has enjoyed. He has lent his aid to every scheme calculated to increase business and bring capital to the city. If he has traded largely on the credit of others, he has lent his own credit without stint or limit. Indeed, it is doubtful whether he ever refused a request to endorse a note or sign a bond. He has put his name on the back of a note without looking at the face of it, but it is said that he never failed to make money in some way out of the transaction. ("Story of," p.4)

ExplorePAhistory.com observed, "He donated homes to the working class . . . and constructed public buildings and signed them over to the city" ("Peter Herdic," para. 7).

Such goodwill gestures—to salve his conscience or to show genuine concern—jeopardized his finances. And with all his projects, payrolls, traveling expenses, and upkeep of buildings, he was risking eventual ruin.

And then came the economic downturn in the lumber industry in the early 1870s. Even though logs crowded the Susquehanna Boom, piles of wood sat outside the mills awaiting orders to process them. Sales at retail outlets fell. Dealers near and far

were reluctant to order more lumber until the demand for it began depleting their inventories. What was the cause of the downturn? Was it just a normal blip in sales that would last a few weeks or months? Unfortunately, no. It was worse than that. It was the Panic of 1873, an economic depression affecting primarily Europe and North America. Historians have not settled on a single cause of the depression in Europe, but they generally agree on the primary cause of it in America: overinvestment in railroads.

Expanding U.S. railroads had been borrowing so heavily to construct new lines that investors on both sides of the Atlantic began to distrust the railroad bonds they held. PBS's *American Experience* series observed:

> The nation's first transcontinental railroad had been completed in 1869. Entrepreneurs planned a second, called the Northern Pacific. [Jay] Cooke's firm was the financial agent in this venture, and poured money into it. ("The Panic of 1873)

Cooke was the same American banker who frequently visited Williamsport and Salladasburg.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury said:

> When Europeans started selling their railroad bonds, there were soon more bonds for sale than anyone

> wanted. Railroad companies could no longer find anyone who would lend them cash. Many railroads went bankrupt."

Cooke's New York City company was among the first financial institutions to go under.

> When people saw that such a big bank failed, they began to run to their banks, demanding all of their money back. The panic spread to banks in Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia and Georgia, as well as to banks in the Midwest, including those in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. Nationwide, at least 100 banks failed. ("Financial Panic," para. 4)

Herdic was in trouble. So were other investors in Williamsport and elsewhere, including those who had tied their fortunes to Herdic's. Nevertheless, he continued undaunted, lending and spending, then borrowing and investing.

In 1874, he paid for a gala wedding reception for his daughter, Florence (nicknamed Flora), after she married well-to-do William Jones McClary, a Delaware carriage maker from a prominent family. The elite of the city attended. They bestowed a potpourri of gifts on the newlyweds and celebrated their wedding well into the night at Herdic's mansion on West Fourth St. ("Story of," p. 4). Flora, the daughter of Herdic's first wife, and her husband moved into a Herdic-built dwelling

on West Fourth St. east of Fifth Ave. Over the next four years, she bore her husband two boys, Thomas and Samuel. The family was happy—or so it seemed to townspeople.

Meanwhile, Herdic continued with construction on another major project, the Herdic Block (754 to 770 West Fourth St.), envisioned as a massive building with hundreds of floor-to-ceiling windows. He planned to extend it from Campbell St. eastward on West Fourth to an alley, then northward to West Edwin St.. A penthouse was to rest on the top of the western corner of the building.

The structure was to have some characteristics of Italianate architecture, including a low-pitched roof and a line of corbels supporting the overhanging eaves. Rectangular walls were to project from the center of the facade and its eastern and western corners. The building was to house offices, retail stores, an opera house, apartments, a courtroom, and a post office. In recent times, George E. Thomas, of the Chicago-based Society of Architectural Historians, described its technical details in an Internet article:

> Eber] Culver designed the building in three units: the four-story main block fronting West Fourth Street, a lower . . . four-story rear block, and a three-story connector along Campbell Street, all tied together with light stone string courses [horizontal courses of stone or brick]. Confronted with making such an enormous

> building elegant, Culver opted for the picturesque. . . . The articulation of its projecting center and end pavilions, variously shaped windows, and boldly framed shop fronts [would] make it an intimidating brick pile.

When it was partly completed, Herdic began housing businesses in its offices, including the Lumberman's Bank, the Susquehanna Boom Company, the Lycoming Gas and Water Company, and lumber firms. But by 1878, Herdic suffered complete financial ruin and lost the ownership of it to a creditor. A *New York Times* front-page article published on Feb. 8 of that year observed:

> The liabilities of Peter Herdic, the well known lumberman of Williamsport . . . are believed to amount to $1,000,000. His assets are very large, though in the present condition of trade it is thought they could not be made remunerative. ("Peter Herdic's Liabilities")

A (New York) Sun article of March 4, 1878, assessed the impact of the economic downturn on the city:

> The debt of Williamsport is said to be one-fourth the assessed value of its property. The value of real estate has decreased in some cases fully seventy-five percent. A month ago the Crawford House, a magnificent hotel in the business center of the city, was sold by auction

> for $15,000. . . . Its cost alone, without the land, was nearly $100,000. (“Story of, p. 4)

A *Forbes* magazine article posted on the Internet on May 18, 2014, put Herdic’s liability figure at $2 million rather than $1 million, as estimated in *The Times* article (Harrington).

One of Herdic’s main creditors was a Philadelphia chemist, Dr. William Weightman, the new owner of the Herdic Block. He and Thomas Powers, his business partner, had developed a synthetic form of quinine that could relieve the symptoms of malaria. During the Civil War, when the disease was rampant among soldiers in mosquito-ridden forests and fields, he reaped a fortune selling the quinine to treat the infected Union troops.

After investing his profits, he became one of the wealthiest men in the nation and one of Pennsylvania’s largest owners of real estate, which included more than one hundred farms in the Philadelphia area.

The Columbus (Ga.) Daily Times, one of many other publications following Herdic’s misfortunes, estimated his liabilities at $2,900,000, an amount equal to $116 million in 2025 (*Dave Manuel.com*). The newspaper said Weightman was “a great friend” of Herdic and his “principal creditor.” It presented an account of how Herdic had become indebted to Weightman. Part of that account said:

> One of Herdic's methods of dealing with Weightman was this: Herdic would purchase large tracts of land wherever he could buy them cheaply. Laying them out in building lots, he erected dwellings on them. No building of this kind put up by him cost more than $3,500. He would sell each house to some person of no responsibility for from $15,000 to $20,000. For payment he would take bonds and mortgages for the amount. These he would take to Philadelphia and sell to his friend, Weightman. ("Peter Herdic's Career," p. 1)

Near the end of the decade of the 1870s, the bonds, mortgages, and other holdings that Weightman and other creditors had obtained from Herdic became virtually worthless, and he declared voluntary bankruptcy. Through legal action, the creditors ganged up on Herdic and began acquiring his tangible assets. When Weightman gained possession of the Herdic Block, he renamed it the Weightman Block and completed the construction of it, retaining Eber Culver as the architect.

Weightman's daughter, Anne, was living at the time in the city with her husband, Robert J. C. Walker, a lawyer and former owner and editor of the *Saturday Evening Post,* who came to the city from Philadelphia with Anne in 1875 to invest in lumber, real estate, and coal deposits. Ironically, the couple lived in a West Fourth St. mansion that had been partly owned by Herdic. While living in Williamsport, Walker served in the U.S. Congress between 1881 and 1883.

At the nadir of Herdic's financial troubles, Walker purchased the Herdic House hotel at the astonishingly low price of $1,200. He also acquired other Herdic properties.

Nearly all of Herdic's other possessions, including land and buildings, were sold at public auction for a pittance. Some creditors who had lost substantial sums sued Herdic to bleed as much from him as they could. By this time, there were those who opined that Herdic was such a slick and unscrupulous character that his financial ruin was really "a huge swindle, and that he [was] yet a millionaire," said the Wilmington, Del., *Daily Republican*, in its issue of July 25, 1879 (p. 3).

Herdic was down for the ten count. But he was not out. Instead, he came up with an idea for the manufacture of two versions of a horse-drawn vehicle that would later become a worldwide sensation.

Fascinating Fact

At the high point of Herdic's fortunes—probably in the late 1860s or early 1870s—estimates of his worth generally ranged between $2 million and $10 million. In today's currency, those figures would amount to about $70 million on the low side and $286 million on the high side.

10 *The Golden Chariot*

Relying partly on the engineering and mechanical talents of Eber Culver, Herdic designed and built horse-drawn cabs and coaches in the late 1870s. Unlike horse-drawn streetcars, they did not run on tracks and therefore could be hailed from the curb. Because of their convenience and mobility, the "herdics," as they were called, became prototypes for today's taxicabs. Early models were bright yellow, like most of today's cabs, and were dubbed "canaries," according to the *Carriage Journal* ("The Herdic Coach," p. 171).

Herdic believed the invention would lift him from the depths of financial ruin. He received patents for a four-wheeled model in April 1880 and a two-wheeled model in 1881. Production of the four-wheeled model began at the carriage shop of James Reynolds and G. D. Evans in the village of Alba, near Canton ("A Flourishing"), the same town in which Herdic built the Minnequa Springs Hotel and Spa. Shops in other locales, including Williamsport, also built herdics after the vehicles gained popularity.

Investors in the major cities of the East—including Boston, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.—bought both the two- and four-wheeled vehicles or gained Herdic's approval to build their own, based on his design. They provided speedy rides in plush seats at an affordable price.

The larger design—ten feet long and eight feet high—seated eight passengers, four on one side facing four on the other. Entry was through a rear door. A lantern lighted the interior. The front wheels were four feet in diameter and the rear, five. *The Carriage Journal* described its technical details.

> The patent of 1880 was mainly concerned with the running gear, which made use of two cranked axles so that the body could be hung low to the ground. The front axle was made rigid with turning arms and stud-axles at each end. The wheels could thus turn in a very small radius without disturbing the stability of the vehicle. The rear suspension was on platform springs with crank axles and the two axles were connected by a double reach. The axles were stiffened by lateral and longitudinal braces and most of the running gear was made of steel or wrought iron. ("Herdic Coach," p. 172)

The larger version of the invention weighed only 1,000 pounds, compared with 2,600 pounds for the typical omnibus, the *Journal* said. One horse could pull it easily. Passengers pulled a strap above them to ring a gong when they wanted to stop, the *Philadelphia Times* noted in an article published on July 24, 1880, after herdics were tested there.

After Philadelphia investors purchased the larger models and put them on the streets in November 1880, a newspaper report

said that the vehicles tended to break down on bumpy streets. However, after the vehicles began running in Chicago the following year, Peter Herdic's representative in that city, Charles E. Jenkins, maintained in an article in the *Chicago Tribune* of June 26, 1881, that the report about breakdowns was false ("The Herdics," p. 12). According to Jenkins, operators of rival streetcar systems in Philadelphia had circulated the fabricated story via the Associated Press out of fear that they would lose riders to Herdic's vehicles. Who was telling the truth, Jenkins or the Philadelphia investors?

That question apparently became moot after Herdic decided to modify the design anyway to strengthen the vehicle against breakdowns and to install a device enabling the driver to open or close the rear door from his seat. Herdic obtained new patents for it in March 1881. At that time, he also received a patent for a two-wheeled version of the herdic for four passengers.

Thereafter, Herdics became commonplace in other major U.S. cities, including Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Buffalo, Denver, Cleveland, Omaha, Ogden (Utah), Atlanta, Austin, Akron, Fort Worth, St. Paul, and Portland, Ore. Smaller cities, too—such as Passaic, N. J. and Portland, Maine—purchased herdics.

The eight-passenger version even inspired the development of what Andrew Woodmansey calls "America's First RV." Its

inventor was Alonzo J. McMaster, of Lockport, N.Y., who named it the McMaster Camping Car, Woodmansey noted,

> In the mid-1880s McMaster saw an opportunity to benefit from the town's [Lockport's] growing prosperity by establishing a fleet of Herdic carriages for public use. . . . By 1888 it appears that McMaster's Herdic carriage business was flourishing, with the *Buffalo Courier* suggesting . . . that McMaster was considering expansion of the fleet. But another transport venture was forming in McMaster's mind that would supersede his public taxi venture—the camping car. (Woodmansey)

When he built it, he used Herdic's coach as a guide for the framework but incorporated his own interior amenities for campers, including an oil stove on wheels, a sink, bunk beds, a kitchen, and a toilet with a bucket beneath a hole, Woodmansey said. After McMaster marketed his invention in advertisements and exhibited it at an industrial exhibition in Minneapolis, he sold a number of the cabs to enthusiastic buyers, Woodmansey noted. However, the company failed at the turn of the century, perhaps because McMaster lacked the promotional skills of a Peter Herdic.

The Herdic invention, on the other hand, achieved great success, especially in Washington, where it commenced operations under the name of the Herdic Phaeton Company.

After the company expanded its routes, its vehicles took riders to destinations all around the central part of the city in competition with horse-drawn streetcars on railroad tracks.

Over the years, it was likely that many a senator or congressman arrived at the U.S. Capitol in a herdic. In an article titled "Lost Capitol Hill: the Herdic Phaeton Stables," The *Hill Is Home* website said:

> In 1883 the herdic company established a line operated by horsepower from 11th and East Capitol Streets to 15th and F Streets northwest, by way of East Capitol Street, Pennsylvania Avenue and 15th Street. This line passed through the Capitol grounds and around the Capitol to the north, the vehicles passing under the steps of the Senate wing to discharge passengers, and in inclement weather doing the same at the House wing.

The *Hill Is Home* also said:

> In order to compete with other services of its type, the company used carriages as designed by Peter Herdic, who made them with a low floor level, to make entry and exit easy. . . . The Herdics were an immediate hit. ("Lost Capitol Hill")

The Washington Post published an engaging little story about the herdic in an article titled "A Fast Ride for 5 Cents." It was posted on an Internet site, *Ghosts of DC*. The article follows:

> A very amusing incident occurred on the Avenue last evening in a hotly contested race between a streetcar and a Herdic cab.
>
> The spirit of emulation had apparently seized both drivers on Fifteenth Street, and without exchanging a word both began to speed their animals. When they had turned the corner of Fifteenth Street to the Avenue, coming down the hill, the streetcar horses were lashed into a run, and the Herdic horse was showing his best steps, and was leading somewhat. The combined rumble of the car and clatter of the cab produced a roar that made all the passers turn and see whether an avalanche was coming down the Avenue. The spectacle of this unusual activity in these leisurely vehicles was exhilarating, when, to the disgust of the driver of the car, the delight of the Herdic man, and the regret of the spectators, the car was hailed, in front of Willard's [apparently the Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue] and the horses were stopped to take on a passenger. The Herdic, of course, sailed swiftly on, but the car was soon started again, and the horses, on a full run, started in pursuit.

> By the time they had reached Thirteenth Street they were about a quarter of a block apart, and both doing their level best, when the Herdic was hailed from the sidewalk and was obliged to stop. The car dashed to the front. Then the race was renewed and all that could be seen was the twinkling lights of the vehicles as they rapidly disappeared down the Avenue. The Herdic had apparently got to the front again, but it was impossible to see. It is safe to say that the occupants of the two vehicles never before had a faster ride for five cents.

As previously mentioned, early models of herdics were bright yellow, the color adopted by twentieth-century cabs in New York, Chicago, and other big cities ("Herdic Coach," p. 171). But Herdic usually does not receive any mention in modern publications for this color innovation, probably because most people associate the term "yellow cab" with motorized vehicles. Instead, sources such as *Time* magazine (2 May 2017), *Wikipedia*, and yellow-cab companies in Miami, Chicago, and other major cities credit either Albert Rockwell—inventor of the mechanical doorbell and a highly successful businessman and politician—or car salesman John Hertz for the innovation.

Rockwell founded a New York City cab company in 1908 and painted his fleet of cars yellow because his wife liked the color. Hertz founded Chicago's Yellow Cab Company in 1915 and

based his color choice on the findings of a university study: that yellow was more noticeable than any other color.

The city of Denver, however, did acknowledge Herdic's contribution and established an ordinance requiring cab and other conveyance drivers to obtain a "Herdic license" until—believe it or not—1988. Here is what Mike McKibbin wrote on Dec. 2, 2016, on *coloradopolitics*, an Internet site:

> Close to 2,200 taxi, shuttle and limousine drivers will likely face fewer regulations in the New Year, when the City and County of Denver is expected to stop requiring them to qualify for and get "Herdic" licenses. Such licenses were named for the Herdic cab, a horse-drawn carriage invented by Peter Herdic. . . . Herdic cabs were designed as passenger vehicles for public transportation, often painted bright yellow, and were predecessors to the modern taxi cab. (paras. 1-2)

Herdic cabs were more popular in Washington, D.C. than in any other U.S. city, in part because the introduction of paved streets coincided with the introduction of the herdic. On June 10, 1934, the *Washington Evening Star* published an excerpt from a work by Frank G. Carpenter about life in the capital city in the 1880s. It said,

> I know of no place [city] where you can get around as easily as here. There are hundreds of horse cars of all

> kinds in the city, and all are cheap. The herdic cabs are boxlike compartments with glass doors, nicely cushioned and elegantly finished . . . . their rates being 75 cents an hour or 25 cents a trip. (p. D3)

In 2012, John Kelly wrote on *The Washington Post* website about the last of the Washington herdics—operated by the Herdic Phaeton Company under a new name, Metropolitan Coach. First, Kelly introduced Peter Herdic as "the kind of up-from-his-bootstraps character who makes you proud to be an American." Kelly said the herdics "were an improvement over the District's horse-drawn omnibuses, which the late D.C. streetcar historian LeRoy O. King described as 'nothing more than urban stagecoaches.' "

Then Kelly republished a poem that he said a "wag" had written about old, neglected herdics when electrified streetcars and motorized conveyances began replacing horse-drawn vehicles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here is the poem.

> How dear to the heart is the 16th Street Herdic
> When rounding the corner it rolls into view;
> Its battered old sides and its windows all broken
> It still is a haven of refuge to you.
> How oft have you tackled that lumbering wagon,
> That jolting contraption, that motor car freak?
> The 16th Street Herdic, the tumble-down Herdic,

> The rattle-trap Herdic that runs once a week.

The herdic cab also gained notice from the renowned American author Edith Wharton in her 1921 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Age of Innocence*, set in the late 1800s. It centers on Newland Archer, a lawyer who marries one woman, May Welland, while in love with her intriguing cousin, Countess Ellen Olenska, a scandalous rule-breaker separated from a Polish count. Here is the passage, with the scene set in Boston:

> They walked back toward Beacon Street, and near the club Archer caught sight of the plush-lined "herdic" which had carried his note to the Parker House, and whose driver was reposing from this effort by bathing his brow at the corner hydrant.
>
> "I told you everything was predestined! Here's a cab for us. You see!" They laughed, astonished at the miracle of picking up a public conveyance at that hour, and in that unlikely spot, in a city where cab-stands were still a "foreign" novelty.
>
> Archer, looking at his watch, saw that there was time to drive to the Parker House before going to the steamboat landing. They rattled through the hot streets and drew up at the door of the hotel.

> Archer held out his hand for the letter. “Shall I take it in?” he asked; but Madame Olenska, shaking her head, sprang out and disappeared through the glazed doors. It was barely half-past ten. . . .
>
> He waited, pacing up and down before the herdic [for what seemed to be a long time] . . . . “If she doesn't come soon I'll go in and find her,” he said.
>
> The doors swung open . . . . They got into the herdic, and as it drove off he took out his watch and saw that she had been absent just three minutes. In the clatter of loose windows that made talk impossible they bumped over the disjointed cobblestones to the wharf.

The herdic not only found its way into a famous book, but it also appeared on the cover of a piano composition, the “Herdic Coach.” Chas. F. Escher Jr. published it in Philadelphia in 1880 as a *da capo* song, an Italian term signifying that the piano player is to repeat the notes between the beginning of the song and the coda (the final section of a composition). The music was dedicated to H. G. Sickel, president of the Herdic Personal Transportation Company in Philadelphia.

Thanks to his invention, Herdic was able to prosper with such success that he regained his standing as an entrepreneur extraordinaire.

But while he was busy promoting his cabs and coaches, another dark cloud had gathered over his life. It involved the disappearance of his daughter, Flora, and her children with an immigrant Englishman who had worked in her home.

Fascinating Fact

The two-wheeled herdic was properly called a cab, not a taxi. The larger herdic was referred to as a coach. The term *taxi* did not come into use until the early twentieth century. At that time, automobile drivers who took people around town for a fee installed devices in their cars that measured the mileage and automatically calculated the fare. These devices were called taximeters. Passengers shortened the word to *taxi* and began referring to cars for hire as taxis. Some riders added the older word *cab* to the name, calling these motor vehicles taxicabs.

11 *Scandal*

In April 1881, Florence Herdic McClary—daughter of Peter Herdic—was the focal point of a widely publicized scandal after leaving Williamsport with a married man, Alfred M. Haswell, a talented upholsterer. She took with her the two children she bore as the wife of William Jones McClary. Both children were boys, one an infant and the other a four-year-old. Haswell left his two surviving children behind to be cared for and supported by his wife, Frances. (Two other Haswell children had died in 1880 of diphtheria.) Where the couple went, no one knew.

Mrs. McClary—nicknamed Flora when she was a child—was born in 1854 to Peter and Amanda Herdic, as noted in Chapter 3. Two years later, Amanda died. In 1860, Peter married Encie Elizabeth Maynard, a virtuous and highly respected member of the community, who then became Flora's stepmother. Under her guidance, Flora became a model citizen, churchgoer, and volunteer in charitable activities. It appeared that she would follow in Encie's footsteps after marrying W.J. McClary. But after the "upright" Flora absconded to a destination unknown with another woman's husband, she shocked the entire city of Williamsport. How could a young woman of promise go so wrong?

Residents gossiped about the couple's disappearance well into the summer. Sometime later, there was a rumor, without evidence, that they had lived for a time in Canada.

Peter and Encie Herdic—as well as their sons, Peter Jr. and Henry, half-brothers of Flora—endured the gossip and carried on with their lives. At that time, Peter Sr. was busy with the manufacture and promotion of his invention, the herdic cab, as well as the aftermath of his financial ruin. One can only imagine the pain the Herdic family suffered after learning of Flora's adultery and disappearance. Local newspapers were mum on the subject of the scandal. Not a word was written about it, perhaps out of deference to Herdic, who still had legions of supporters in Williamsport.

Five-and-a-half years passed without any confirmed reports of the couple's whereabouts. But in early September of 1886, a Williamsport man recognized Flora and Alfred on a visit to Rockford, Ill., and shared news of his discovery with the public. As a result, the whole sordid story erupted onto the pages of newspapers, including the Williamsport *Daily Sun and Banner*, the *Weekly Sun and Banner*, *The New York Times*, the Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin*, the *Rockford Daily Register*, the *Rockford Republic*, the *Rockford Weekly*, the *Pennsylvania GRIT*, and other publications.

The news of Flora and Alfred's whereabouts returned the saga of their notorious adventures to center stage among the

scandalmongers of Williamsport. Peter Herdic's enemies no doubt reveled in schadenfreude. The following background information and summary of events in the scandal are based on articles in the publications named in the previous paragraph.

Haswell and his wife were natives of England, where they married in 1862 at Sheerness, on the Isle of Sheppey in County Kent. Later, they emigrated to the U.S., eventually ending up in Williamsport. At the corner of William and West Third Sts., Alfred established an upholstery shop and furniture store. Over the years, his upholstery work and that of his employees received high praise from residents of the community. A short article in the Dec. 15, 1880, issue of the Williamsport *Daily Banner* recounted a visit to the shop by representatives of the newspaper. It said, in part:

> We were not only surprised but astonished that such elegant workmanship could be done in this city. Mr. Haswell . . . employs none but superior workmen in his establishment, and from what he showed us we are satisfied that he can do just what he claims when he says they can do just as good work as can be done in New York or Philadelphia. (p. 2)

Haswell also received plaudits for his upholstery work on the furnishings in Grace Methodist Episcopal Church on Campbell St. ("Grace M. E. Church").

In addition to his upholstering, he sold “all the new styles of parlor furniture,” said his frequent display ads in local newspapers.

After Flora hired the craftsman and his employees to upholster furniture in her home, on the north side of West Fourth Street a short distance east of Fifth Avenue, she and Alfred became enamored of each other. Flora then began spending time in his downtown store, sometimes remaining inside for hours at a time. When Frances learned of the visits, she instinctively suspected Flora of enticing Alfred into an affair. She began sleuthing for evidence of infidelity and even monitored his movements. Whenever she questioned him about Flora’s visits, “her husband excused [them] and said it would not do for him to offend a profitable customer by requesting a discontinuance of her calls” (“Found at Last,” p. 4).

As time passed, Alfred and Frances led separate lives even though they resided under the same roof. They did not dine together or sleep together, the newspaper said. One evening in early March of 1881, Mrs. Haswell was walking up West Fourth St. when she saw her husband in the shadows on Park St. and Flora running across West Fourth from her house to greet him. Their rendezvous and behavior suggested to Frances that they were indeed lovers. Impulsively, she attacked Flora, choking her so violently that her husband had to intervene to separate them. Flora ran back into her home. Frances followed.

When she asked the servants to summon Mr. McClary, they told her that he was “out of town” (“Found at Last”).

A month later, Alfred and Flora disappeared. Poof! They moved from place to place like nomads before finally settling in Rockford, a northern Illinois town of 14,000. There, they posed as husband and wife.

After Alfred opened an upholstery and furniture shop, he and Flora became respected members of Rockford society. They even attended church regularly. Eventually, their past caught up with them in the person of the Williamsport man who recognized them and reported news of his discovery.

When a *Daily Sun and Banner* reporter went to Frances Haswell’s Williamsport home on Erie Ave. in September 1886 to interview her, he first told her where Alfred and Flora had been living (“Found at Last,” p. 1). She perked up upon hearing this news, for she had long hoped to sue Alfred for support of her children and herself. Everyday life for her had been distressing and painful after he left, especially in the summer of 1885, when another Haswell child, teenager Augusta Maud, died. Her death left only one Haswell child still alive, Fred, who was nearing his twentieth birthday.

During the interview, Frances revealed the details leading up to her husband’s desertion of her, including her violent attack on Flora and an episode at the funeral for a Haswell child who had

died in 1880, when Haswell and Flora were still living in Williamsport.

“Mrs. McClary [had sent] a heart of English violets with a white lily in the center, with orders that it be delivered only to [Mr.] Haswell,” the *Sun and Banner* said. “Mrs. Haswell refused to profane the dead with the guilty emblem and threw it into her husband’s face” (“Found at Last,” p. 1).

Friends of Frances arranged for a police officer, George Bubb, to shadow Alfred.

“He collared the gay Lothario one night as he was going into McClary’s,” the *Sun and Banner* said. “Mrs. McClary gave the whole thing away by visiting the police station the next morning and inquiring the name of the officer . . . doubtless intending to offer him hush money.”

In the ensuing months, Mrs. Haswell obtained a legal separation from her husband and an order requring him to pay $10 a week in support. That amount would be worth about $345 in 2025 (*Dave Manuel.com*).

To escape their predicament, Alfred and Flora decided to leave town. Before their departure, Flora rounded up the expensive silverware and gold-plated items she and Mr. McLary had received as wedding gifts and tucked them into her traveling bag (“An Eloping Couple”). She also took $300 of her

husband's money, worth more than $10,000 in 2025 (*Dave Manuel.com*). During his long absence, Alfred never sent any money to Frances, building up a debt of thousands of dollars before his discovery in Rockford in September 1886.

Mrs. Haswell traveled to Rockford and filed charges to get the money owed her. Not long after her arrival, a *Rockford Daily Register* reporter found her dining in the Griggs House hotel (p. 4). Although her attorney had advised her not to disclose any details in the case, she politely told the reporter,

> I am here on business—nothing more. I care no more for Mr. Haswell than I do for any other man. He has not my respect. I am here after my money that should have been paid me from week to week for the maintenance of myself and my family. . . . I have many friends in Williamsport and I believe if Haswell were there, they would lynch him. ("She Is After Him," p. 4)

When a *Register* reporter called at Flora's home to interview her, she refused to admit him, saying, "You will learn nothing from me. We will not talk" (p. 4). A *Register* representative who encountered Alfred on a street told him that Frances Haswell was in town. Alfred said he was in a hurry and had no business with her. Later, he denied knowing her and maintained that she was trying to blackmail him ("She Is After Him," p. 4).

During this time, Peter Herdic traveled to Rockford, perhaps in an attempt to help his daughter acknowledge her wrongs and work her way back to respectability. However, no reports surfaced to suggest what passed between them.

Meanwhile, William Jones McClary, the hapless cuckold who had married Flora eleven years earlier, obtained a legal divorce from her. *The New York Times* reported the following additional information:

> Mr. McClary, the husband of the eloping woman, is now living in Delaware, where he held an aristocratic position before coming [to Williamsport]. He expects to be married again in a short time. . . . Mrs. Haswell has had a bitter struggle since her husband's desertion, and [is acting] to get her rights at Rockford. Williamsport society is in a whirl of excitement over the discovery of the elopers, and it is the talk of the town. ("An Eloping Couple")

McClary never did remarry.

In a court hearing in Rockford, "the guilty pair put on a bold face and endeavored to brave the thing out," said the *Daily Sun and Banner* on page 1 of the Oct. 18, 1886, issue.

Rockford residents, who appeared to sympathize with Frances Haswell, testified that Flora and Alfred had been residing

together as husband and wife. When Frances took the stand, "she burst into tears and denounced Haswell to his face that he was a rascal and a villain and that he was her lawful husband and he knew it," the *Sun and Banner* said.

In the following weeks, while the Rockford court was considering the next step in the case, Alfred and Flora jumped bail and disappeared again. Thereafter, they went their separate ways.

Mary Sieminski, of the Lycoming County Women's History Project, reported in the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette* that Flora lived for a time in Philadelphia as the wife of a man named John Fanning and, after his death, as the wife of a Parisian native, Edouard Benac (p. E3). She ended up in Westport, Conn., where she died at age 56 in July 1911. She was buried in Westport's Willowbrook Cemetery, according to the *Find a Grave* Internet site. The site displays a photograph of her and confirms her as the daughter of Peter Herdic and the wife of Benac.

After his escape, Alfred went to Chicago, a Rockford resident told Haswell's son, Fred, when he was in Rockford to be with his mother ("Strange Sequel," p. 1).

Over the years, Fred had received letters from his father. One sent in 1888 bore an Ottawa postmark (Farmerie). In 1895, George Zercher, a Williamsport tobacconist, encountered

Alfred in Rochester, N.Y., and spoke with him, Fred reported ("Strange Sequel," p. 1). But Alfred refused to confirm his identity.

Newspapers reported that Alfred Haswell never returned to Williamsport. But their accounts might have been wrong. Todd A. Farmerie wrote on *rootsweb.com* that he did come back ca. 1899 after living in Baltimore. He appeared in the guise of an optician, calling himself Professor Thomas Turner, Farmerie said. According to published evidence posted by Farmerie, Haswell supported himself by going door-to-door to peddle small bottles of "Russian cement." This was an adhesive (such as glue or mucilage) manufactured in Gloucester, Mass., by the Russia Cement Company.

Turner/Haswell lived in a boarding house at 33 East Third St. for nearly a year before drowning himself in the Susquehanna River near Newberry on May 4, 1900. The Williamsport *Daily Gazette and Bulletin* of May 5, 1900, reported that he had left a note to his landlady, Mrs. Elvira R. Baker, which said:

> Newberry, May 3, 1900. - Dear Mrs. Baker, sell my effects and keep the proceeds for what I owe you. I thank you for your Christian kindness to me. I have suffered much physical pain and mental anxiety in the past few months and I can bear it no longer. I trust my heavenly father will take me to a better world, and

> forgive me for all my sins and errors here. I am sincerely, “Thomas Turner.” (“Committed Suicide”)

Local residents who had seen “Turner” before his death reported that his face was an exact likeness of Haswell’s. Fred, his only living child, was called in to identify him. Although he had not seen his father in twenty years, he believed that the body he saw was his father’s. But he was not absolutely sure. He revealed an important morsel of information published May 7, 1900, in *The Williamsport Sun*, which said: “He had sometime ago heard that his father was traveling under the name of ‘Turner’ ” (p. 1).

The body was taken to the John Knight Funeral Home, where more than one hundred city residents filed by to view his remains. Most of them said they were certain it was the body of A. M. Haswell, the upholsterer. Some of them signed affidavits swearing to that assertion.

Among those who examined the body were Mr. and Mrs. Casper Reidy. Of their examination of the corpse, *The Williamsport Sun* article said: “A small red mark on the left eyelid, similar to a scar, is one of the things that make Mr. Reidy and his wife sure that “Turner” is Haswell” (p. 1). An article in the May 6 Pennsylvania *GRIT* reached the same conclusion.

After the city hired a handwriting expert to review letters Haswell had written to his son over the years, the expert compared them to documents written by "Turner" before his death. He concluded that the handwriting styles were the same. The *Williamsport Daily Gazette and Bulletin* of May 10 then printed an article with this headline: "Turner was Haswell: All Doubt as to the Suicide's Identity Now Dispelled*."*

If Turner was in fact Haswell, why did he take his own life? One can only speculate on that question. It is possible that the deaths of three of his four children before age twenty and the death of Frances Haswell herself in 1891 may have triggered in him deep remorse, depression, and despair. Or, if he had learned of the remarriage of Flora to Fanning and then to Benac, he may have felt alone, isolated. And then there was a report that he had been suffering from a serious throat condition.

According to *The Williamsport Sun*, Alfred Haswell's body was buried at 2 p.m. on May 18, 1900, in Wildwood Cemetery after a funeral conducted there by the pastor of a Newberry Lutheran church ("Haswell Buried," p. 1).

But that was not the end of the story. In July of 1900, Williamsport newspapers blazoned with more headlines about Haswell. This time, they all reported that Turner was not Haswell after all. Here is what happened.

Fred Haswell filed a claim as the beneficiary of a Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance policy issued to the elder Haswell years before. The premiums had been paid in full. Before settling with the younger Haswell, a company detective named Chaffee conducted an exhaustive investigation to verify the validity of the claim.

After visiting Williamsport and hearing the stories of persons who knew Haswell and viewed his body, he concluded that A. M. Haswell had indeed called himself Thomas Turner. But the detective did not stop there. Further investigation (the details of which newspaper articles did not reveal) led him to a Baltimore man, a Professor May. When the detective interviewed him in that city, May said Thomas Turner had been a friend of his when the latter was a student of phrenology in Brooklyn in 1881, the same year Haswell and Flora Herdic McClary left Williamsport.

The detective then went to Brooklyn to continue his investigation. There, he learned that this “second” Turner had also sold Russian cement, like the Williamsport Turner. Meanwhile, a Mrs. Ross in Southport, England, had sent Fred a letter saying Thomas Turner was her brother. Moreover, she sent him money to pay the expenses for the funeral and burial. (“Sister Pays,” p. 5). How she learned of the case was not disclosed.

Connecticut Mutual decided that A. M. Haswell was not Thomas Turner. Nevertheless, it approved a settlement with Fred Haswell on condition that any future developments in the case would not alter the amount paid to him. He accepted the settlement.

Many Williamsport residents continued to hold fast to their position that Turner was Haswell. The mystery surrounding his death was never resolved to the satisfaction of everyone. The insurance company's detective, Chaffee, commented that he had never before investigated a case so bizarre, so full of twists and turns.

12 *The Last Days*

Achieving success with his horse-drawn cabs required Herdic to travel to other cities and towns to promote his invention. The trips no doubt provided him a welcome break from his financial problems and an escape from the gossip in Williamsport about the scandal involving his daughter.

Being away from town, enjoying anonymity and the soothing sway of railroad cars, was perhaps part of the impetus that drove him to other climes from time to time to satisfy his appetite for new challenges. The challenge he settled on in the 1880s, besides promoting his cabs, was to put to work what he had learned in Williamsport about financing, chartering, building, and maintaining a waterworks. Using this knowledge, he would help other communities meet their water needs. Among the municipalities that engaged his services were Selinsgrove, Canton, and Huntingdon, all in Pennsylvania; Cairo, Ill.; and Orlando, Fla.

Orlando has a metropolitan population of more than 2.6 million today. But when Herdic visited it, the town had fewer than 3,000 residents. In 1886, he and two other investors, A. A. Parker and Harry W. Lentz, became the incorporators of the water system (Orlando Utilities Commission, p. 3).

The town began to construct the system in 1887. A lake outside the infant community was the source of water to serve the homes of residents while providing fire protection. In explaining why the town turned to Herdic and the other two men, the Orlando Utilities Commission said in a 2023 booklet presenting its history of water and electricity systems:

> They and their financial backers, who were from Pennsylvania, had successfully negotiated franchise arrangements and built water works in other Pennsylvania communities as well as in Cairo, Ill. (Orlando Utilities Commission, p. 3)

However, Herdic was not in Orlando to witness the completion of the project. Instead, he had returned to his home state to tend to everyday business and to check on the water system he had helped to establish at Hungtingdon, about 95 miles southwest of Williamsport. On Feb. 2, 1888—a cold, icy day—he slipped and fell while inspecting the Huntingdon system, suffering a jarring blow to his head and a painful injury to his hip. But instead of going to a doctor for treatment, he returned to Williamsport.

Although suffering from nausea, he still did not see a doctor. When the nausea subsided, he went to New York City to conduct business and join his wife. She had been vacationing at the Glenham Hotel at 935-939 Broadway in the Flatiron District of Manhattan. But it was not long before his condition

sent him to bed and gradually ate away at his ability to function. Paralysis of part of his body set in, and he became comatose. On March 2, 1888, one month after his fall, he died. News of his death shocked Williamsport. Townspeople realized —some perhaps for the first time—that he was the one who led the city and the rest of north-central Pennsylvania to prosperity and international renown. After his body was returned to the city and taken to his West Fourth St. home, crowds of mourners filed in to express their condolences.

Herdic was survived by his wife, Encie; his sons, Peter Jr. and Henry; and his daughter from his first marriage, (Flora). She had not returned for his funeral, which was held at 3 p.m. on March 5 at Trinity Episcopal Church. At the request of the mayor, local businesses closed between 2 and 5 p.m. in observance of his passing. He was buried in Williamsport's Wildwood Cemetery. Publications in Williamsport, Chicago, New York City, Harrisburg, and elsewhere around the country eulogized him in editorials and evaluated his achievements in news articles. Following are excerpts from some of those publications.

Daily Sun and Banner, Williamsport, March 2, 1888

> Peter Herdic is dead! These startling words will fall like a thunderbolt upon the people of Williamsport. It means to them the end of a man whose name will live in the local annals as long as the town stands, and whose

> energy and ambition are stamped upon many of the enterprises and projects that have aided to make Williamsport the city that she is. The first and most dashing magnate of the city, the death of such a man may well create a commotion in our town. ("Peter Herdic Dead, p. 2")

The New York Times, March 3, 1888

> He bought up large tracts of land in the outskirts [of the city], laid out streets, paved them and built sewers, erected a large hotel called the Herdic House, and, in fact, made the city what it is to-day. . . . Mr. Herdic went into very many big enterprises in order to provide work for the laboring classes, and the result was a disastrous failure in 1879. He then invented the herdic cab and made money enough out of it to get another start on the road to wealth, which he followed with remarkable success. ("Death of," p. 2)

Butte (Mont.) Semi-Weekly Banner, March 7, 1888

> New York, March 3. — Peter Herdic, a millionaire lumberman of Williamsport, Pa., died at the Glenham Hotel yesterday. Herdic invented . . . the Herdic cab, which bears his name. Williamsport, Huntingdon, Pa., Cairo, Ill., and other places are indebted to him for their water systems. (p. 1)

Daily Sun and Banner, Williamsport, March 3, 1888

> Williamsport's prosperity undoubtedly actually began with the advent of Peter Herdic among us, and while his acts might not all command our approval, still every man, woman, and child in the town is proud to admire the energy and ability by which he rose to influence and power among his fellow men. Peter Herdic came very near to being a great man. ("Peter Herdic, p. 4")

Daily Gazette and Bulletin, Williamsport, March 6, 1888

> Yesterday afternoon was one which will be long remembered by the citizens of Williamsport, as it brought forth the funeral service and burial of Peter Herdic, known in every State in the Union as a man of immense enterprise. . . . ("Laid in Wildwood, p. 4")

Lycoming Reporter, Williamsport, Pa., March 10, 1888

> Of his personality, it is unnecessary to write. He was known far and wide as the most energetic, farseeing, and successful men of the time; he found himself in boyhood abjectly poor, and raised himself to be a power in the great financial circles of the day. He found Williamsport a slow-going little burgh, and carried it with him to a point where it became the chief city of

> this part of Pennsylvania. Unlike many other men, he was willing that others should share in the wealth he produced. . . . He was the foremost man of all who have helped in the development of the material wealth of our region. (“A Generous Man”)

The Cairo (Ill.) Citizen, March 8, 1888

> It is with much sadness that we are called to chronicle the departure from life of Mr. Peter Herdic, who died at New York on Friday of last week, his death resulting from a fall and the breaking of a blood vessel. Mr. Herdic was a man of great energy and perseverance, he having been the founder of the much used Herdic coaches, builder of the Cairo Water Works, and was connected with numerous other enterprises. While among us Mr. Herdic made many warm friends who regret to learn of his demise and join with us in extending to his family . . . heartfelt sympathy in this their hour of bereavement. (“Mr. Herdic”)

Portland (Maine) Daily Press, March 9, 1888

> The death of Peter Herdic and the author of the Hansom cab will hand their names down to a posterity which will use their inventions without knowing, probably, that it [posterity] is continually calling the inventors by name. (p. 1)

Kane (Pa.) Leader, March 8, 1888

> Thousands in Williamsport . . . will sorrowfully and sincerely mourn the death of Peter Herdic. (qtd. in Smith)

Middleburgh (Pa.) Post, March 8, 1888

> Mr. Herdic will be remembered as the great "lumber king" of the West Branch Valley and was at one time reported to be worth not less than four million dollars. . . . In the death of Mr. Herdic Williamsport sustains a deep loss. A progressive citizen, whatever may have been said against him by his enemies, it cannot be denied that had it not been for Peter Herdic Williamsport might now have been nothing more than a village of a few thousand inhabitants.

Herdic's death at age sixty-four ended the thirty-five-year period in which he led Williamsport to a golden age of growth and prosperity.

In 1889, the year after his death, nature added to the woes of Williamsport when it sent a catastrophic flood to the city that broke open the Susquehanna Boom, releasing hundreds of thousands of logs that battered shoreline sawmills and

lumberyards and rode the raging waters into the city or downriver. For Williamsport, it was the worst flood of the nineteenth century. The lumber industry never fully recovered from the disaster and, in the early twentieth century, it died. In the Great Depression years of the 1930s, residents of the city began yearning for another Herdic to revitalize the economy. In its Aug. 12, 1933, issue, the Williamsport *News Mirror* summed up the residents' feelings in an editorial. Part of it is reprinted below.

O, for a Peter Herdic!

> Groping its way slowly back to business and industrial stability, Williamsport today has need for such a man as Peter Herdic. What Williamsport has been—or ever will be, for that matter—it owes to Peter Herdic. . . . No one appointed him chairman of anything; he organized no committee. Almost single-handedly, he set out to build a city. . . . No organization backed him. But he had the will that would not down.
>
> His first local venture was a large flouring mill, for which he imported grain from the West. Then he acquired control of the Susquehanna Boom. He bought a large tract of land in the city, from Hepburn Street west, and gave the Pennsylvania Railroad land for its yards. In 1864 he built the Herdic House, now Park Hotel, nearly a mile from the then business section, and induced the Pennsylvania [Railroad] to erect its main

passenger station adjoining. . . . To meet the needs of his section of the city he organized a water company, using Mosquito Creek as the source of supply. . . . Progress for Williamsport, to Peter Herdic, meant a breaking from the old ways of doing, so in 1866 he influenced the Legislature to make Williamsport a city. For years, he practically controlled City Council, and his influence with the State Legislature was almost unlimited. . . .

Industries owned or controlled by Peter Herdic included sawmills, a brush factory, rubber works, nail works and others, giving employment to hundreds. He organized the Lumberman's National Bank, and, realizing the influence of the press even in those days, acquired the morning newspaper of the city. He built a horse-car line from the east city limits to his new West End, and [invented] a type of vehicle which became widely known as the "herdic."

Largely due to Peter Herdic, beautiful Trinity Church was erected, but his religious activities did not end with the denomination of his choice. He gave land to the Annunciation Parish, the First Baptist Church, the Congregational Church on Third Ave., and the First Evangelical Lutheran Church on Basin Street, and contributed to the Jewish Synagogue at Front and Mulberry Streets. . . .

> Herdic was a plunger, yet was regarded as one of the greatest financiers in the United States in his time. He failed in 1878 for a million dollars, and within five years the properties he turned over were worth twice that amount. While his activities extended far beyond Williamsport in his later years, he was first and last for Williamsport. He was a man who did things, and he could not be kept down. Some of the methods he employed to attain his ends may have been open to question, but there's no denying that he always gave himself unselfishly and unstintingly for the good of Williamsport. Peter Herdic was a builder! He did things! He did them in a big way! He did them without regard to the past, without regard to what anyone might think or say! He accomplished and achieved—but only because of an indomitable will, and in spite of opposition. O, for another Peter Herdic in Williamsport's present hour of need!

The list is long of other publications that noted the death of Herdic in their columns. It is even longer for publications that printed articles about his lumbering days, his other business interests, and his highly popular invention. Here is a list of a few of those publications.

Abilene (Kans.) Reflector
Altoona (Pa.) Tribune

Atlanta Constitution
Birmingham (Ala.) Age Herald
Boston Globe
Boston Post
Cheyenne (Wyo.) Daily Leader
Chicago Tribune
Daily Dispatch, Richmond, Va.
Daily Kennebec (Maine) Journal
Dayton (Ohio) Herald
Deseret News, Salt Lake City
Der Deutsche, Baltimore
Eureka (Nev.) Daily Sentinel
Fort Worth Gazette
Grand Rapids (Mich.) Herald Review
Helena (Mont.)Weekly Herald
Indianapolis State Sentinel, Indianapolis, Ind.
Lancaster (Pa.) Daily Intelligencer
The Morning Star, Providence, R.I.
Nebraska State Journal, Lincoln, Nebr.
The New Yorker (magazine)
The (New York) Sun
The New York Times
The New York Tribune
Ogden (Utah) Standard
Omaha Daily Bee
Perth Amboy (N.J.) Evening News
Philadelphia Inquirer
Sacramento Daily Record-Union

St. Paul Daily Globe
Salt Lake Herald, Salt Lake City
San Antonio Daily Light
San Francisco Examiner
Santa Fe New Mexican
Savannah (Ga.) Morning News
Washington Evening Star
Washington Post
Washington Standard (Olympia, Wash.)
Waterbury (Conn.) Evening Democrat
Wilmington (Del.) Evening Journal

The Architectural Legacy

When Peter Herdic built his magnificent home in the mid-1850s at 407 West Fourth St.—then on the outskirts of Williamsport—he inspired other wealthy citizens to construct their own grand dwellings on the same street or on nearby thoroughfares. Many of those homes survive today. Others that were equally spectacular in their styling have fallen to the wrecking ball.

The section of the city with the most Victorian homes is now known as the Millionaires' Row Historic District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is a kind of memorial to the elegance of the lumber-era architecture and a reminder of Herdic's influence in the development of the district. It centers primarily on buildings on West Fourth St., from Elmira St. to Seventh Ave. (which is called Susquehanna St. south of West Fourth).

More than a hundred of the surviving buildings are genuinely significant. *Victorian Homes* magazine and the travel section of *The New York Times* have showcased some of them in illustrated articles.

Unfortunately, some structures in the district, such as business buildings and apartment dwellings constructed over the years, stand as "intrusions" because they are out of character with the

Victorian designs surrounding them. Other dwellings are of minor interest because they exhibit a few Victorian features. Preservation Williamsport—a nonprofit organization of volunteer citizens—has dedicated itself to restoring and maintaining the Victorian style and ambiance of the district. Its website says,

> Victorian mansions are being brought back to life through painstaking renovations and restorations. Gardens and parks, dormant for so many years, also are being brought back to their original splendor and the neighborhoods are adorned with beautiful new Victorian period street lamps and hanging baskets cascading with flowers. . . .The key to Williamsport's future lies right here in its past. Showcasing our historic district attracts tourists and tourism dollars. . . .

To be sure, scores of other spacious and splendorous mansions abound elsewhere in the city, notably in the Vallamont and Grampian sections. Construction of them began at the end of the lumber era while Williamsport was transitioning to a city of diversified industries. Some of these homes would not be out of place in Beverly Hills, Calif. However, most of them lack the historical cachet of the dwellings of the Herdic era.

Images of homes and other buildings erected between 1854 and the early twentieth century are pictured below, preceded by a glossary of architectural terms used to describe the images.

Most of the structures still exist in varying forms: original, restored, partly restored, or improved, in some way. A few have been razed for one reason or another. Also pictured in a separate section are old public-domain images related to significant people and subjects in previous chapters in this book.

Glossary of Architectural Terms

asymmetrical facade: Front of a house or another building with designs that are intentionally out of balance. For example, the front may have a round tower on the western side and a flat gable on the eastern side. Queen Anne homes usually have asymmetrical facades.
belt course: Horizontal band of stone or another material running along a wall or around a tower.
capital: Top part of a classical column, such as a Corinthian or an Ionic column.
corbel: Bracket, often ornamental, that supports the flat underside (soffit) of an overhanging eave.
Corinthian column: Column with a capital that depicts acanthus leaves.
Cresting: Ornamental railing on a roof.
crowsteps: A series of blocks resembling steps on the sloping borders of a roof.
cupola: Rooftop structure with windows and/or vents. A cupola (also called a belvedere) was a commonplace feature of Italianate mansions.
dentils: Small rectangular blocks used as adornments for eaves and moldings.
dormer: Window structure built into a sloped roof.
Eastlake: A type of Queen Anne architecture with highly decorative features such as lathe-turned posts and spindles, as

well as jigsaw-cut designs, pediments, carvings, lattices, and contrasting dark and light colors.
Eave: Underside of an overhanging roof. An eave that is flat is also called a soffit.
facade: The entire front of a building.
finial: Upright ornament on a rooftop, turret, cupola, dome, fence post, bed post, or lamp shade.
fretwork: Wood or metal with spaces carved out to form an ornamental pattern.
gable: Wall below the triangular border of a roof.
gambrel roof: Roof with two slopes on both the front and back sides. The lower slope is steeper than the upper slope.
hood mold or **hood**: Projecting mold over a window or another opening of a building to protect it from rain or provide an eye-catching ornamentation. Hood molds can be arched or horizontal.
Ionic column: Column having a capital with the left and right ends each resembling a rolled-up scroll.
Italianate: Having a design based on Italian architecture of the Renaissance era. An American Italianate building has a gently sloping or nearly flat roof, often topped with a cupola. The roof extends beyond the walls and usually has corbels supporting the eaves. Italianate windows are tall and narrow. Quoins frequently run up corners of walls and a central tower. The windows and other features on the facade are arranged in pleasing symmetry.
lintel: Wood, stone, or metal beam across the top of a door, window, or another opening to support the wall above it.

mansard roof: Roof with short concave or convex slopes and curving, straight, or S-shaped sides.
neoclassical: Having a design that revives features of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, such as massive columns supporting a roof. Neoclassical design emphasizes simplicity, using straight lines rather than elaborate ornamentation.
newel: Supporting post to which a staircase handrail is attached. A newel may be round or rectangular; it may even be shaped in a spiral. It is usually made of wood but may be made of another material, such as metal. Wooden newels in Victorian homes often exhibit elaborate carvings.
oriel: Bay window; one of the projecting windows in an alcove.
pediment: A design (usually triangular or rounded) under the apex of sloping borders.
polygonal: Having three or more flat sides.
portico: Roofed entranceway before a front door.
porte cochère: Roofed structure projecting from an entrance to receive carriages and protect coming or going passengers from the elements.
Queen Anne: Ornamented architecture with an asymmetrical front and steep roofs forming gables and pediments. Other features of Queen Anne design may include polygonal turrets, bay windows, and wrap-around porches. The design may borrow features of other types of architecture.
quoins: Rectangular blocks running up the exterior corners of buildings as a decoration. Every other block is indented and wraps over the corner of the building.

Richardsonian-Romanesque: Design based on eleventh- and twelfth-century European architecture that revived features of ancient Roman buildings. Its characteristics include heavy stone blocks, rounded arches, squat columns, towers (sometimes topped with conical roofs), and contrasting colors.
Romanesque: Design based on eleventh- and twelfth-century European architecture that revived features of ancient Roman buildings, notably rounded arches over windows and doorways.
Second Empire: Building design featuring a mansard roof, usually with dormers projecting from the slopes.
soffit: See *eave* in this glossary.
turret: Tower built into a wall or corner of a house or another building.
veranda: Roofed porch or platform running along the outside of a building.

Photo and Illustration Gallery

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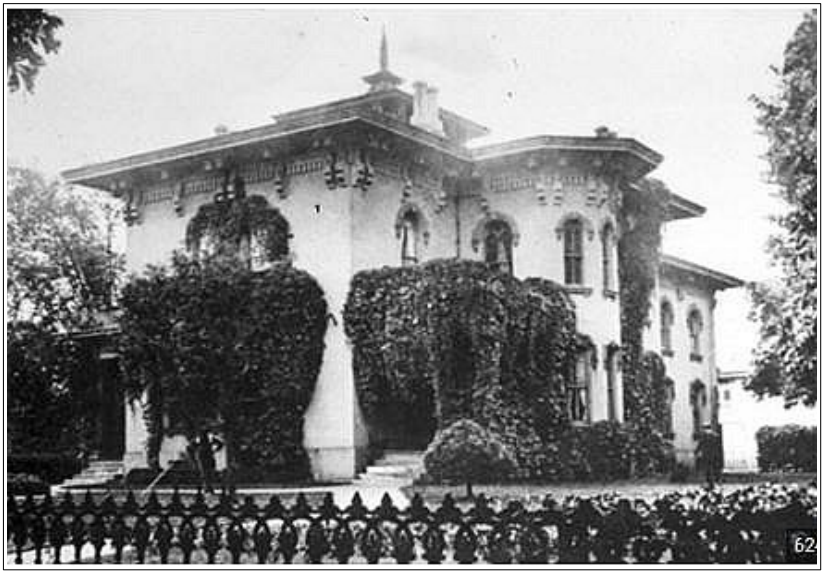
Herdic Home in 19th Century



Architect Eber Culver completed the Peter Herdic home, 407 West Fourth St., in 1855 in the Italianate style. The house inspired other lumber barons to construct their own homes on property bought from Herdic in what is known today as the Millionaires' Row Historic District. (Photo from the Pa. Power Library)

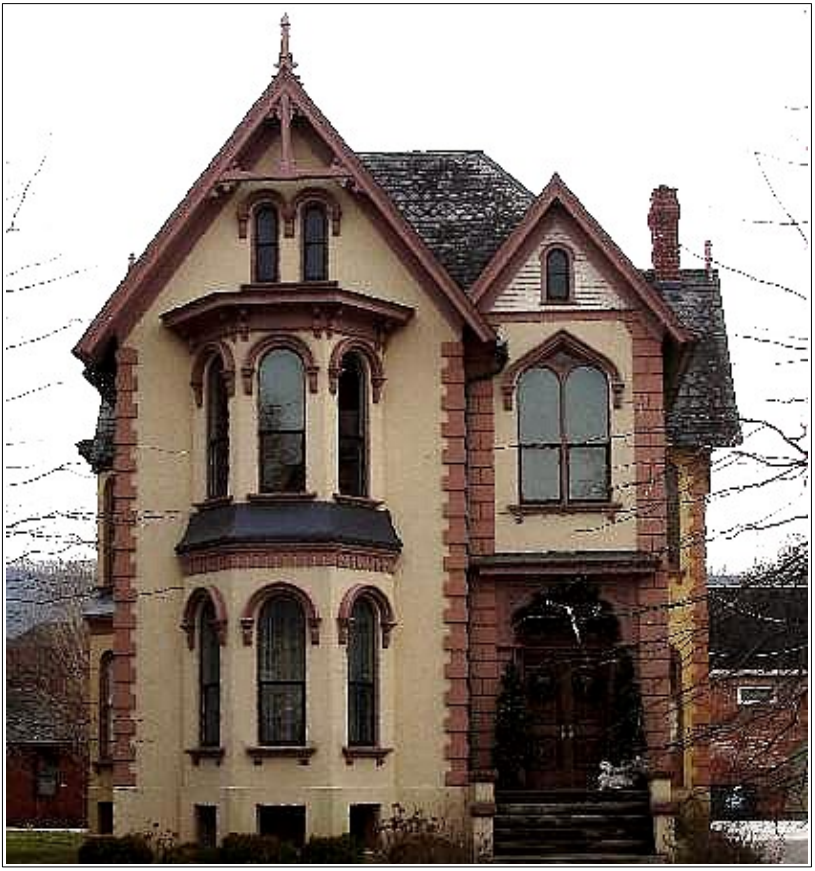
Restored Herdic House

The restored Peter Herdic home recaptures many features of the original dwelling and now serves as an elegant restaurant that attracts diners from near and far. It has received rave reviews from critics for its cuisine and Victorian ambiance. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Hermance House

The A.D. Hermance home, 405 West Fourth St., was designed by architect Eber Culver in the Richardsonian-Romanesque style to convey solidity and power, using heavy stone blocks. Boston architect Henry Richardson originated the style, which revives the Romanesque appearance of European buildings in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The dwelling dates to ca. 1855. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Hartshorn House



The Frederick Hartshorn house, 419 West Fourth St., dates to 1873. The gable beneath the finial has tall oriel windows on the first floor and second floors, all crowned with eyebrow hoods. Quoins adorn the corners of the building. Hartshorn was the operator of a planing mill. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Kline House

The James N. Kline house, 519 West Fourth St., was built ca. 1910 in the neoclassical style, with a projecting portico roof supported by Corinthian columns. Dentils line the eaves of the house. Kline, owner of a hardware store, purchased land at Ramsey, Lycoming County, and donated it to the Williamsport Boy Scout Council for outdoor activities (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Abel Dubois House

The Abel Dubois house, 525 West Fourth St., was built between 1865 and 1875 under architect Eber Culver. It is an Italianate home with the characteristic low-pitched roof on the top and overhanging eaves supported by corbels. Quoins adorn the corners of the building and the centerpiece above the porch roof. The eyebrow window hoods accent the facade. Dubois owned a tannery and lumber business in Bodines, Lycoming County. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Rhoads House

The Hiram Rhoads house, 522 West Fourth St., is an Eastlake dwelling featuring lathe-turned porch posts and jigsaw-cut insets on the second-floor balcony. It has an asymmetrical façade. Rhoads was the first city resident to have a telephone. Fascinated with it, he founded the Central Pennsylvania Telephone Company and became a well-to-do resident. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

L.C. Kinyon House

Pictured is the home of L.C. Kinyon, an Italianate structure built in ca. 1875 on West Fourth St. between Locust and Walnut Sts. It had curved arches on the front porch and quoins on corners of the house. The archives of Williamsport's J.V. Brown Library say Kinyon was the owner of a Williamsport shingle mill and a mill complex in Cameron County. The house no longer exists. Extensive research has not disclosed the reason for its disappearance. (Photo from the J.V. Brown Library via the Pa. Power Library)

James W. Bowman House

The James Walton Bowman house, 619 West Fourth St., was constructed ca. 1895 in the Queen Anne style. It has tall chimneys, steep roofs, dormers, and a porch wrapping around the eastern side of the house. J.W. Bowman was the son of Benjamin Bowman, a lumber baron. As an enthusiastic promoter of baseball in the city, J. W. raised funds to build a ballpark for professional teams. His efforts resulted in the construction of Bowman Field—named in his honor—on upper West Fourth Street in the 1920s. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Smith-Ulman House

The Smith-Ulman house, 634 West Fourth St., has a roof with steeply sloping sides. Called a mansard roof, it was typical of Second Empire architecture in France while Napoleon III ruled from 1852 to 1870. A mansard roof has concave or convex slopes and curving, straight, or S-shaped sides. The Smith-Ulman house has a concave slope and curving sides, with single corbels supporting the eaves. Architect Isaac Hobbs designed it for lumberman Henry B. Smith. Clothier Moses Ulman purchased the dwelling in 1880. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Rowley Mansion

The Edwin A. Rowley house, 707 West Fourth St., is among the jewels of Millionaires' Row. It is a thirteen-bedroom mansion completed in 1888 under architect Eber Culver. Triangular shapes project from roofs, and a single window with a rounded hood begs for attention on the second floor. The interior has high-quality stained-glass and intricately carved woodwork. Now restored and serving as a museum, it is one of the finest examples of Queen Anne architecture in Pennsylvania. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Annunciation Catholic Church

Annunciation Catholic Church, 707 West Fourth St., was completed in the 1880s under architect Amos Wagner after Peter Herdic donated land for the Romanesque building. (Photo by M.J. Cummings, 2025)

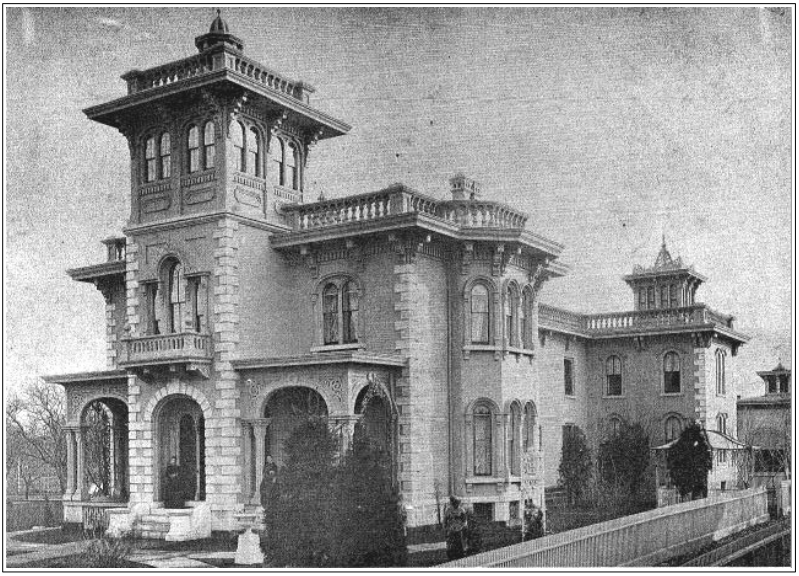
Herdic/Weightman Block

Peter Herdic began constructing this massive building, the Herdic Block, at 754-770 West Fourth St., in the early 1870s. Dr. William Weightman completed it after he acquired the building during Herdic's bankruptcy. He renamed it the Weightman Block. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Trinity Episcopal Church

Trinity Episcopal Church, 844 West Fourth St., was completed in 1875 after Peter Herdic paid for 85 percent of its cost. Architect Fred Thorne began the project and Eber Culver finished it. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Mahlon Fisher Mansion

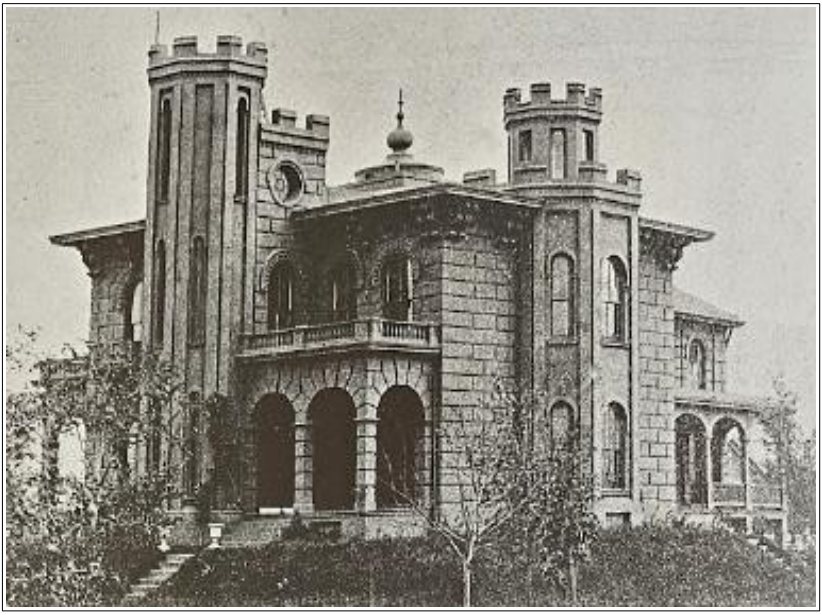


The Mahlon Fisher mansion, 815 West Fourth St, is pictured here in the 1974 Historical Preservation Plan of the Lycoming County Planning Commission. Architect Eber Culver designed the building and supervised its construction in 1866 as an Italianate dwelling with projecting eaves, quoins on the corners of the building, cupolas, balustered roof railings, and rounded hoods over windows. Fisher doled out the modern equivalent of $24 million to build it. Fisher, an experienced lumberman, had joined with Peter Herdic and John G. Reading to take control of the Susquehanna Boom in 1857. The mansion was razed in 1927 to make way for a new YWCA building.

Mary Gamble Emery House

Prominent features of the Mary Gamble Emery house, 835 West Fourth St., are the polygonal tower, the crowsteps on the front gable, and the robust walls and porch columns. Architect Eber Culver completed the house in 1889 in the Richardsonian-Romanesque style. Two years after the death of her first husband, Mary Gamble married wealthy lumber baron William Emery. The newlyweds then moved into the West Fourth St. “castle,” a wedding gift to Mary from her new husband. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Robert Faries House



Lumberman Robert Faries completed this house at 847 West Fourth St. between 1855 and 1861. It featured an Italianate roof, projecting eaves, Romanesque arches, and tower crenelations resembling those of a medieval fortress. Crenelations were notches through which archers shot arrows at an attacking army. Peter Herdic bought and then resold the property to John White, a lumberman. In 1913, J. Roman Way acquired the property and replaced it with a small park, Way's Garden, then donated the park to the city. (Public-domain photo posted on the Internet at *Valley Girl Views*)

Clark House

Architect Amos Wagner built this many-windowed mansion at 907 West Fourth St. in the 1890s for lumberman Timothy Clark and his wife, Martha, using brick and brownstone in the Queen Anne style. Highlights include the polygonal tower with recessed windows and square medallions. Bay windows project from the wall on the western side of the asymmetrical facade. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Herdic House Hotel

This is a postcard view of the rear of the Herdic House hotel, 800 West Fourth St., after it changed hands and became the Park Hotel. On the lower right is a covered walkway that travelers used to walk from the Pennsylvania Railroad Station to the hotel to check in or grab a quick meal before resuming their journey. The photo is posted on the Internet at *Valley Girl Views*.

Eutermarks-Harrar House

Architect Eber Culver built this Italianate house in 1870 as a gift that Samuel Filbert and his wife, Emma, gave their daughter Lucy when she married John Eutermarks, a local attorney. Highlights of the house, at 915 West Fourth St., include quoins lining the center and corners of the house. In 1901, Elwood Harrar, who had worked as a general passenger agent for the Philadelphia and Erie Railroad, purchased the house for his wife and six children. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Robert Foresman House

The Robert Foresman residence, 951 West Fourth St., dates to ca.1865, when it had a mansard roof. In 1885, after a fire damaged the roof, a contractor reconstructed the upper part of the house, installing Queen Anne roofing, said the Lycoming County Historical Society ("Historical Walking Tour," p. 10). The house has fifty rooms, more than enough for a curious child to explore. Foresman, a hotel owner, was its first occupant before the fire (p. 10). (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Henry Foresman House

Lumberman Henry M. Foresman built this brick house in 1905 at 912 West Fourth St. in the Dutch Colonial Revival style, a main feature of which is a gambrel roof, one with two slopes on both its front and rear sides. Three dormers below pediments project from the lower roof slope in the front. Ionic columns rest on stone masonry to support the portico roof, imitated by smaller column pairs supporting the porch roof. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Weightman-Walker House

Of mixed design, this house at 1005 West Fourth St. exhibits hoods over tall windows, corbels beneath eaves, and an asymmetrical front. What makes it especially noteworthy is not its architecture but its occupants between 1875 and 1890: Anne Weightman Walker and her husband, R.J.C. Walker. In the early1900s, Anne's husband and her father—Dr. William Weightman—both died, bequeathing her a fortune so vast that she became "probably the wealthiest woman in the world," according to *The New York Times*. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

John Reading House

The John G. Reading house, 1025 West Fourth St., stands out as an example of Second Empire architecture. The house was constructed in 1865 with black marble fireplaces in each room. The front door and all the windows except those in the alcove on the western side have pedimented hoods. Cresting adorns the borders of the roofs. Reading, an experienced lumberman, joined with Peter Herdic and Mahlon Fisher in 1857 to gain majority control of the Susquehanna Boom. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Judge Gamble House

James Gamble, president judge of the Lycoming County Court from 1868 to 1878, lived in this Second Empire home at the southeast corner of Mulberry and East Fourth Sts. Unlike the Second Empire Smith-Ulman house, which has a concave mansard roof, this dwelling has a convex mansard roof. Ornate carvings surround the dormer windows. Hood molds highlight the windows of the facade. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Henry Parsons House

This Queen Anne house at 825 West Fourth St. was the residence of attorney Henry C. Parsons and his family. Among its features are steep roofs, a shaded balcony, and a set of three windows on the first floor. Parsons was the city's eighth mayor (1882-1884) and served as a member of the convention that adopted the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1874, which remained in effect until 1968. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

James V. Brown House

Lumberman James V. Brown and his wife, Carile, lived in this grand home at East Third and Basin Sts. It had a concave mansard roof with four dormers projecting from its front. His wife conceived the idea of building a library, and both of them planned it. In his will, he left enough money for it. The result was the James V. Brown Library, opened in 1907 (after both had died) at the northwest corner of East Fourth and Basin Sts. (Photo from *History of Lycoming County*. Philadelphia: D. J. Stewart, 1876)

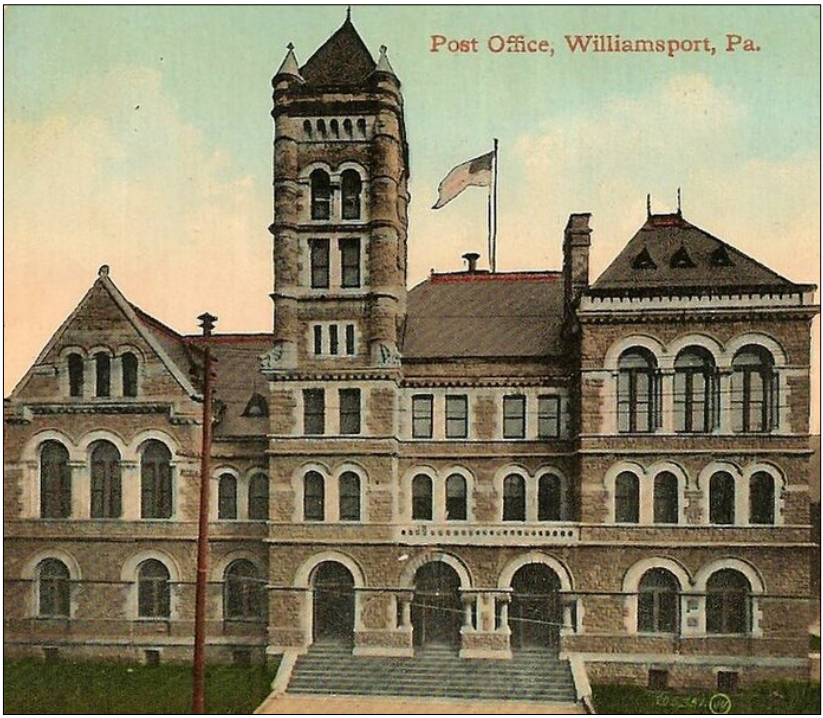
Linck's Castle

Jacob. H. Linck, a prominent Williamsport hardware merchant in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, lived at the corner of Rural and Sixth Avenues in the house pictured here. With its stone walls, central tower, and stout pillars, it resembled a fortress. Although named "Overlook," it was dubbed "Linck's Castle" because of its imposing appearance and its location on high ground. (Public-domain photo posted on the Internet at *Valley Girl Views*)

Old City Hall

Architect Eber Culver constructed this building at 454 Pine St. in the 1890s as the new Williamsport City Hall. Its robust walls and rounded arches were typical of architecture in medieval Europe. City officials decommissioned the building in 1979 and moved its offices to the U.S. Post Office building, at 254 West Fourth St. Thereafter, "Old City Hall"—as it came to be known—served as an office building until Timothy and Sandra Norton Butters purchased and renovated it, then reopened it in 2016 as the City Hall Grand Hotel. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Post Office

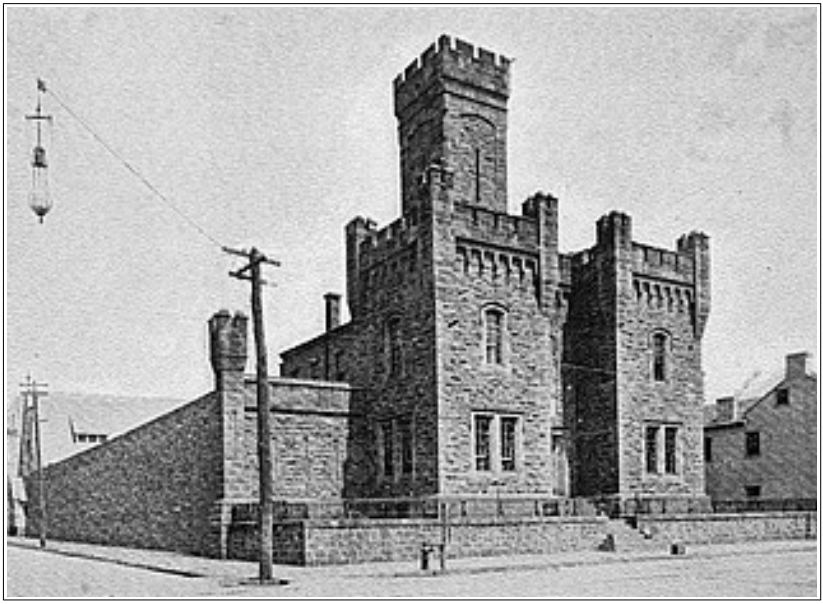


Willam Alfred Freret Jr. designed the Williamsport Post Office in the Richardsonian-Romanesque style, presumably to symbolize the rock-solid reliability of the Postal Service. Freret had served for a time as the supervising architect for all federal buildings in the U.S. The building, at 245 West Fourth St., was completed between 1888 and 1891. In 1979, it became the new Williamsport City Hall after offices in the Old City Hall closed for lack of space to accommodate its staff and functions. (Photo posted by Wikipedia)

Hart Building

The exterior of the Hart Building, 26-30 West Third St., looks like a new addition to the downtown. But it was built in the 1890s by Architect Amos Wagner for two clothiers, the Hart Brothers, to house their shop and those of other businesses ("Self-Guided"). Its exterior consists of brick, carved stone, and terra cotta. Everything about the building suggests order and symmetry. In September 1984, the U.S. government awarded it a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. (Photo by Michael J. Cummings, © 2025)

Old County Prison



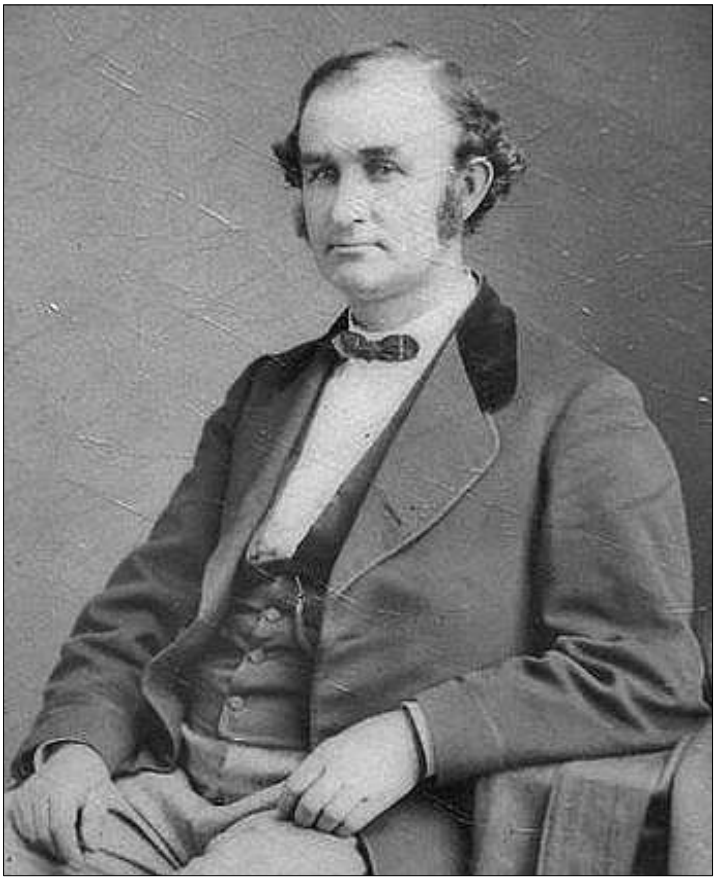
In 1868, York (Pa.) architect Edward Haviland completed this sandstone building at 534 West Third St. as the new Lycoming County Prison. It replaced a fire-damaged prison built in 1801. The new building exhibited characteristics of a medieval fortress, but its tower was removed in 1927. The jail served its purpose until 1982, when the county closed it mainly because of overcrowding and began building a third prison at West Third and Hepburn Sts, The latter building opened in 1986. Haviland's prison now serves as a popular nightclub. (Public-domain photo posted on the Internet by the local *Clio Club*.)

Images of People, Places, and Things

Susquehanna Boom

Two men rest on logs in the seven-mile-long Susquehanna Boom. A chain of logs attached to anchored supports called cribs formed a border between the flowing river (upper right) and the boom. The log chain was, in effect, a fence that kept the cut logs in place. The photo is posted on the Internet at *Lumber Heritage.Org* in an article titled "Explore History on the Lumber Heritage Water Trail."

Peter Herdic



Source: James V. Brown Library, Williamsport, Pa.

Amanda Taylor Herdic

Source: Lycoming County (Pa.) Historical Society

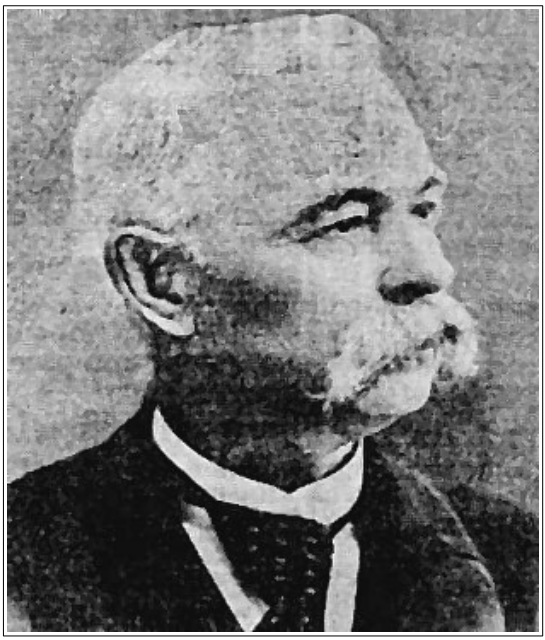
Encie Maynard Herdic

Source: Lycoming County (Pa.) Historical Society

Florence Herdic McClary

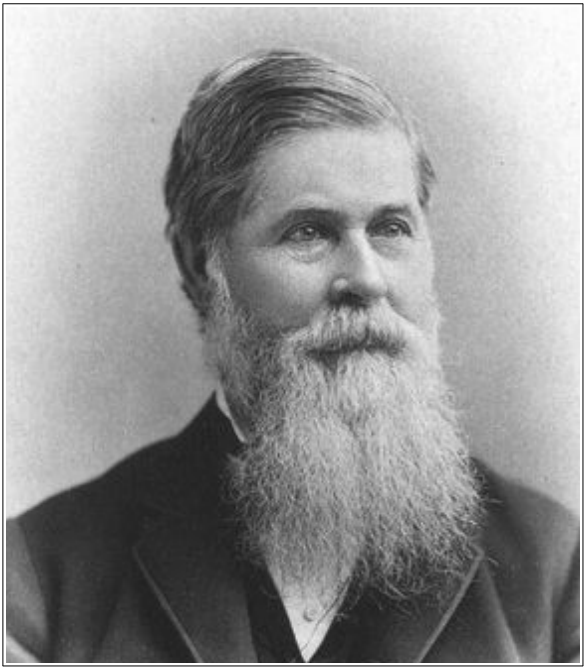
Source: Lycoming County (Pa.) Historical Society

Eber Culver



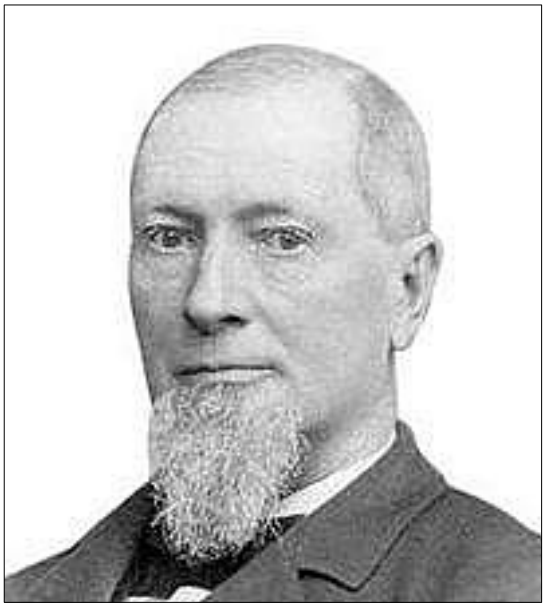
Source: *Sunday Grit*, Williamsport, Pa., Nov. 1988

Jay Cooke



Source: National Park Service

Dr. William Weightman



Source: *Wikipedia*

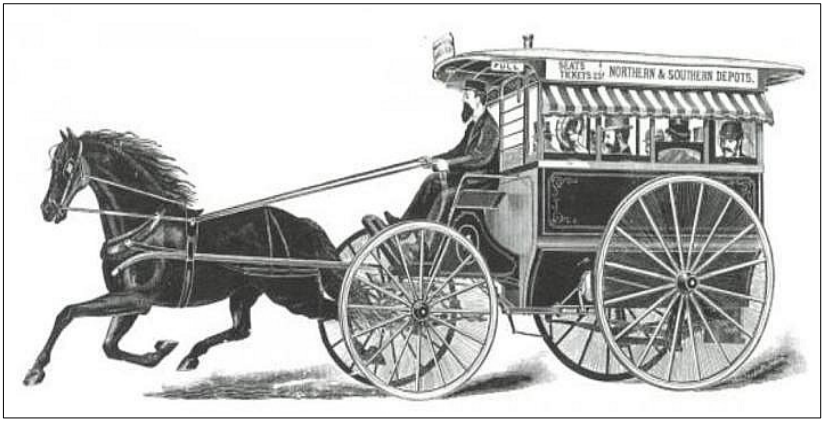
Anne Weightman Walker

Source: *Wikipedia*

Steam Locomotive at 5th Avenue

Mitch Dakelman, photo archivist for the National Railway Historical Society, granted me permission to use this June 1, 1952, photo by R. L. Long to accompany my reprinted *GRIT* column in Chapter 8. It shows a Pennsylvania Railroad steam locomotive (K4s 5447) pulling passenger cars out of the Williamsport station for a trip to Buffalo, N.Y. The gate tower at the right was on the corner of Fifth Ave. and Nichols Place, a block north of West Fourth St.. (Source: National Railway Historical Society)

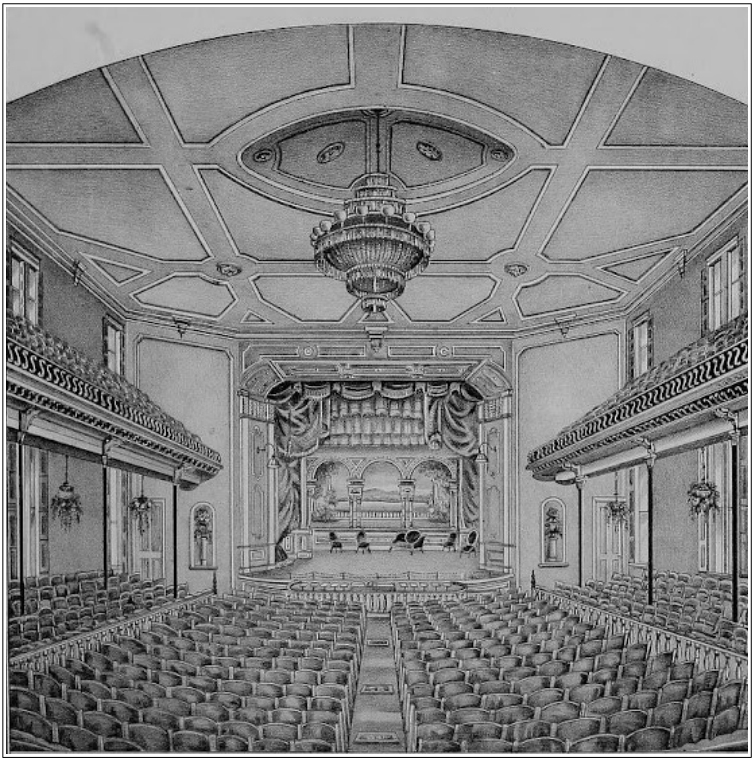
Herdic's Coach and Cab



Four-wheeled coach (Lycoming County (Pa.) Historical Society)

Two-wheeled cab in Washington, D. C. (Google Images)

Elliot's Academy Illustration



Eliott's Academy of Music opened in 1872 at 355 Pine Street under the ownership of W. G. Elliot. (Source: *Valley Girl Views*, susquehannavalley.blogspot.com)

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That mansion and other restored dwellings helped inspire me to look into the development of Williamsport in the nineteenth century and above all into the life of Peter Herdic, the entrepreneur extraordinaire who turned a town of just 1,600 residents into the lumber capital of the world in the three decades after arriving in the community in 1853.

About the Author

Michael J. Cummings was born in Williamsport, Pa., in 1941 and graduated from St. Joseph's Parochial School in 1959. After earning a bachelor's degree in English from King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., he taught English for four years in public schools in Muncy, Pa., and Elmira, N.Y. He furthered his education at Elmira College, Lycoming College, and the American Press Institute at Columbia University.

In 1968, he joined the editorial staff of *GRIT*, a former Williamsport publication with national, state, and local editions. After serving as a national-news writer and local reporter, he became the Pennsylvania editor, national editor, managing editor, a columnist, and an editorialist. In 1984, he left *GRIT* and became a freelance writer, specializing in feature articles and medical writing. He worked nineteen years as an adjunct English instructor at Penn College in Williamsport.

Cummings has written five print books, including a guide to the complete works of Shakespeare. His Internet site on Shakespeare was recommended by the *British Library* and *The New York Times* when it was in operation between 1995 and 2022. He has written more than twenty e-books and more than 1,000 articles for newspapers, magazines, and medical centers.